NINTENDO POWER

Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance

Skylanders: Giants • Xenoblade Chronicles

Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir • 2011

Nintendo Power Awards • Darksiders II

276

MARCH 2012

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*Wireless broadband Internet access required for online play. For more info, go to support.nintendo.com.**Deposit may be required.
Download code delivered with purchase of Kid Icarus: Uprising. See participating retailers for details: GameStop, Amazon and Best Buy.

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NINTENDO 3DS

NINTENDO POWER

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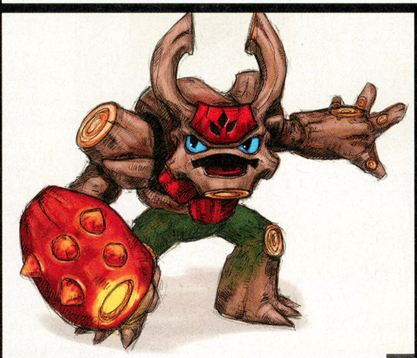

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THE 2011
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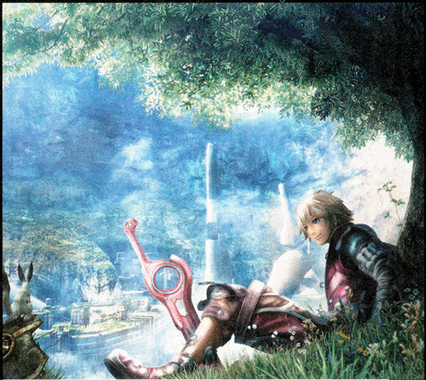
2011 NINTENDO POWER AWARDS 46



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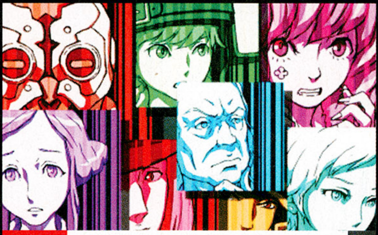

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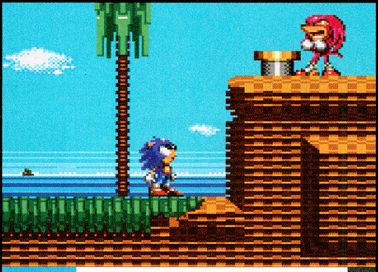

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DS = NINTENDO DS
DW = DSiWARE
GBA = GAME BOY ADVANCE
N3DS = NINTENDO 3DS
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
Wii U = Wii U
WW = WiiWARE

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Pulse

A Great Start

Chris Slate

Even the most jaded gamer would have to admit the Nintendo 3DS handheld is on a roll. Coming off a chart-topping holiday season punctuated by two titanic Mario titles, the system is charging into 2012 with great games such as Resident Evil: Revelations, Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D, and Kid Icarus: Uprising, plus we can still look forward to Luigi's Mansion 2, a fresh Paper Mario, the next Animal Crossing, and an exclusive new entry in the beloved Kingdom Hearts series (see our cover story on pg. 34).

And how about that Wii console, huh? It's no surprise that The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword took home several top honors in our annual Nintendo Power Awards (pg. 46), but while many looked to Link and co. to close out the Wii console's run, the system continues to host some significant titles—most notably the addictive Rhythm Heaven Fever (pg. 85), the epic Xenoblade Chronicles (pg. 58), and Skylanders: Giants (pg. 42), the sequel to last year's surprise smash hit. I don't expect Wii blockbusters to keep rolling in all year now that the gaming world has focused on a revived Nintendo 3DS and the upcoming Wii U console, but it's great to see Wii make more of an impact in its sixth year than many expected.

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS
EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW
DOUBLE MARIO
POSTER INSIDE
NINTENDO POWER
2012 PREVIEW ISSUE
Kid Icarus: Uprising leads Nintendo's heavenly lineup!
+ PAPER MARIO
LUIGI'S MANSION 2
ANIMAL CROSSING
MARIO PARTY 9
V275 JAN/FEB 2012

This is The Hoff here, pleased to report that a couple of months into 2012 the world has still not ended. Until it does, we're gonna keep printing and answering your letters, so here's our special request for this issue: what features would you want to add to the upcoming Wii U system to make it even better? Send your responses to the address on page 6.

LETTERS

The Rayman Revolution

It's a rare occurence when a game not made by Nintendo gets a 9.5 in your magazine, so I was very excited to see Rayman Origins receive that very rating in its wonderful review. I must say that that game definitely has earned it! It is now my all-time favorite side-scrolling platformer with its stunning graphics, wonderful music, great gameplay, and amazing fluidity and rhythm. I play this game with my little sister constantly and the game has honed her platforming skills so that she can now hold her own in challenging games like this. I look forward to (hopefully) many more amazing games like this that make gaming fun and accessible to players of all ages and skill levels. **—VISIBLECC1**

We could hardly put it better ourselves. If you haven't yet played Rayman Origins, you're missing out!

Open Sesame

In Super Mario 64 for the Nintendo 64, how come Mario has to use stars to open doors? Couldn't he just open them with a crowbar? **—64DUDE**

Our best guess: he probably left his crowbar in his other pair of overalls.

Power to the People

I got the new Nintendo Power today and was so happy to see Good People Die on the "What We Hope to See in 2012" list. Please try to find out about localization of that game soon. I'm itching to play it, and I've recently lent the original to a few friends (because they couldn't find a copy) and they are just as psyched about a sequel. Though I hope they don't go too overboard and overplay the franchise card, I'm betting it'll be just as good as if not better than the first! **—STAADSY**

Your wish is our command. If you want some good news about the game commonly known as Good People Die, take a gander at page 8! And the game is far from a traditional sequel, so you can probably put those worries aside.

The End Is Nigh

I must say, Hoffman, hats off to you for your mention of The World Ends with You last issue. I feel it is an obscure stud of a game that needs more appreciation. You should talk about it more. Meaning every issue. *Do it*! **—ECHOE**

Your wish is our...wait, I already said that, didn't I? Anyway, just turn to page 34 to find out what Neku and the other characters from The World Ends with You are up to these days. Hint: Keyblades are involved.

I read the preview of Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure, and I noticed that the violinist, Marie, resembles Maria Robotnik from the Sonic the Hedgehog series. Maria is one of my favorite video game characters, and I think it's cool how Sega made another character like her.
—RAMEN NOODLEZ

STEALING THE SHOW

Music, mystery, and mayhem take center stage in Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure for Nintendo 3DS.

Pugilistic Prowess

Let's Dance!
AS SEEN IN STAGE 201—SHOW TIME

Striking a Pose

On the Run

Full Tilt

Left-Out Lefties?

I was just reading your giant Kid Icarus: Uprising article in Vol. 275 and I noticed in part of your article you talked about its controls. You said one of the player's hands will be using the touch screen and the other one will use the Circle Pad and L Button. Now, being a lefty I was confused at the controls. Do you have any idea about if this game will be somehow controllable by lefties, or are we all out of luck? **—JAMESIAE72**

Kid Icarus: Uprising will in fact support left-handed controls via the Circle Pad Pro. You'll be able to move Pit with the right Circle Pad and aim by using the system's touch screen.

Only Human

For their next game, Nintendo simply *has* to make Nintenhumans! We could play the role of a dog or cat, and chew up our Nintenhuman's stuff, growl at our Nintenhuman's friends, and throw up on our Nintenhuman's bed. Sounds like fun to me. **—LEWANUT**

To each their own, I guess. I was hoping for Nintencapybaras.

Review Redux

In a recent issue you said that if a game is bad you typically won't review it. If that's true then why do you review nearly every licensed game that's released, like Tron and Captain America? **—TREY D.**

To clarify, we don't avoid reviewing bad games; we avoid reviewing bad games you probably won't pay attention to anyway (like, say, M&Ms Beach Party). As a general rule, we intend to review every noteworthy game, including ones based on big-name motion pictures, good or bad.

Ready to Ride

Back when Kid Icarus: Uprising was announced, I started thinking of what other dormant Nintendo franchises could be brought back next. I immediately thought of this one game, and I've been saying it ever since: Mach Rider. What do you guys think?! **—KRIS R.**

I'm in favor of it simply based on Mach Rider's catchy soundtrack. The tune has been in my head ever since it was featured in Super Smash Bros. Melee!

Circular Reasoning

Is it possible for someone to fit into a ball like Samus does?
—JEFFY518

We've wondered about that for a long time. Do you think you could try it out and let us know?

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

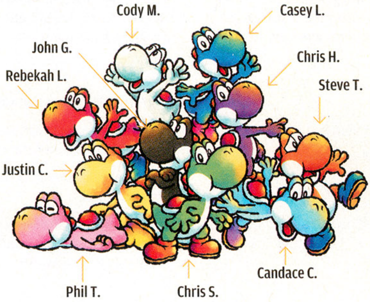
I know that I am going to be yelled at, but why is Mario so great? He is just a fat plumber that beats up spiky fire-breathing turtles. I think games should only use characters that are awesome like Pit, Samus, and Chuck Norris.
—CHUCKNORRISASAURUS

Liquid Hoff says: At last! *At last!* Finally someone who understands! For years I've proclaimed the inferiority of so-called heroes such as this Mario. What has he ever done other than hold his brother down, knock defenseless creatures out of their shells, and then waste taxpayer money by galavanting about with that hussy of a princess? And his workout routine—nothing short of offensive! Since you are clearly a person (or possibly creature) of great intellect, I shall allow you to become one of my lackeys once I rid the world of such overachieving do-gooding imbeciles! I hereby dub you Gaseous Iguana! My first command: make me a cake.

The Truth Is Out There

I've always wondered what you guys at NP look like. You always use your Mii characters! Please reveal the secret! **—JOSH G.**

If you look hard enough, you might see a few of us on various pages of the magazine. But since you asked nicely, here's a group shot of the NP crew all together (before Slate was launched into space, that is).


Cody M.
Casey L.
John G.
Chris H.
Rebekah L.
Steve T.
Justin C.
Candace C.
Phil T.
Chris S.

> My favorite part of Skyward Sword? Ghirahim! The guy is so creepy and sadistic, and yet he proved to be an entertaining villain.
> **—MARKTSHARK**

What's the best part of The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword?

My favorite part of Skyward Sword so far is the Beetle. I think that it implements the Wii MotionPlus controls in a very fun way.
—DOUG J.

So I was playing Skyward Sword recently, and I got to the part in the game where you're talking to the old Kikwi in Faron Woods. Before he talks about Farore's Flame he tells you that "it's a secret to everybody." I was like, "Hey! He totally quoted that from The Legend of Zelda for NES!" I was just wondering if anyone else picked up on that. I don't know if they did it on purpose, but I thought it was a clever little addition. **—MANDYKAT**

My favorite part of Skyward Sword is the bathroom in the Knights Academy. Finally Link can take a well-deserved break from his adventure and take care of business. **—THE GREEK**

My favorite part of Skyward Sword? Definitely the story; Skyward Sword is the only video game that has ever made me cry. And I don't mean light tears. I mean *sobbing*. I had to pause the game just so I didn't freak out my parents! It was the most touching, sad, and surprising ending of a game I have *ever* seen. Your Game of the Year award will no doubt go to this masterpiece.
—ROBOTORTOISE

I consider myself a hardcore Zelda fan, and I've beaten most of the games. However, Skyward Sword has the most amazing boss fights. It's so cool smashing Koloktos with those gigantic swords! And is there anything more awesome than sniping stuff with your bow? I also enjoy the upgrade system and watching your sword power up over time. And Groose. Groose is the real hero of the game.
—LINKROXASDUDE

Have you enjoyed the new Link as much as I have? For the first time we can see all kinds of emotions on his face, as well as in the way he carries himself. Whether a terrifying beast bursts into the scene or a good friend comes into view, he responds in a delightfully lifelike way that I don't recall ever seeing in past Zelda adventures. He reacts to every moment with personality, and I find that it not only greatly deepens my experience with the story, but it makes him much more endearing as a character. **—WHITNEY**

My favorite part has to be when Groose flies down to the surface with Link. I loved his reactions to Faron Woods and how he called it "Grooseland." My sister and I found that hilarious!
—ASTYANAX

I'm about 45 hours into the game, and out of about 45 hours of amazing moments, hands down, everything in the desert country of Lanayru is my favorite thing. Not just in Skyward Sword, but in the entire Legend of Zelda series. Stunning. **—JOHN O.**

My most favorite part about the Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword is the Tingle doll in Zelda's bedroom. There are two ways to see it: Go into the room to the left of Zelda's room and peek through the crack in the middle of the wall on the right. Or you can actually go inside her room by going on the roof and using the Clawshot to drop through the chimney! It is an excellent Easter egg to feature in a game! **—SORA4WIIU**

PLEASE WRITE US

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Understand that the magazine staff is separate from Nintendo; we don't make the games.

Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

NINTENDO POWER

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What Nintendo fans think, want, and do

The SCORE

WEIGH IN ON NEXT MONTH'S TOPICS AT WWW.NINTENDOPOWER.COM/POLLS.

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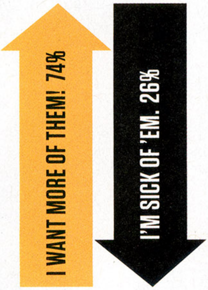


WHICH CONTRA CHARACTER NAMES ARE BETTER?

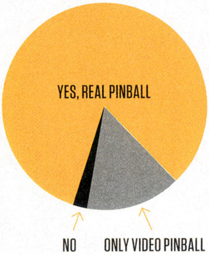
Mad Dog & Scorpion

65%

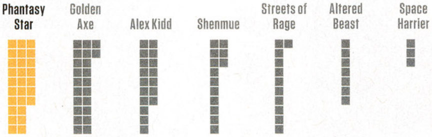
Bill Rizer & Lance Bean

35%

HAVE YOU EVER PLAYED PINBALL?



WHICH SEGA SERIES SHOULD RETURN?

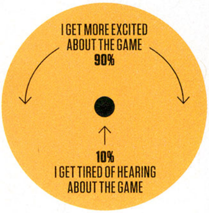


WHICH IS COOLER FOR LINK TO RIDE?

EPONA

Epona 50% • A loftwing 34% • The *King of Red Lions* 16%

WHEN I REGULARLY READ ABOUT A BIG-NAME GAME THAT WON'T BE OUT FOR A WHILE...



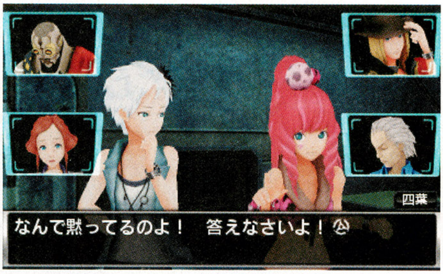
HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU GOT INTO VIDEO GAMES?

5 TO 11	56%
YOUNGER THAN 5	40%
12 TO 17	2%
18 TO 25	1%
OLDER THAN 25	1%

HAVE YOU EVER MADE A CUSTOM LEVEL FOR A GAME?

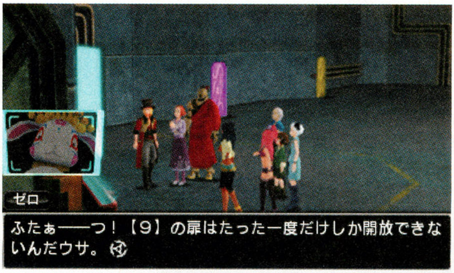
54%	**Yes, but only for myself and my friends.**
33%	**No.**
13%	**Yes. It was a featured creation!**

POWER UP



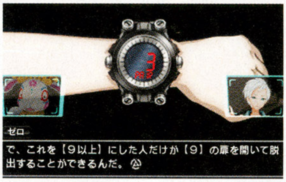
四葉

なんで黙ってるのよ！　答えなさいよ！



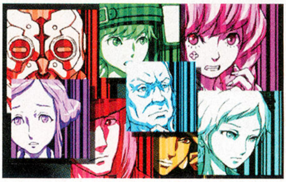
ゼロ

ふたぁ——つ！【9】の扉はたった一度だけしか開放できないんだウサ。



ゼロ

で、これを【9以上】にした人だけか【9】の扉を開いて脱出することができるんだ。



Nine Persons, Nine Betrayals, Three Dimensions

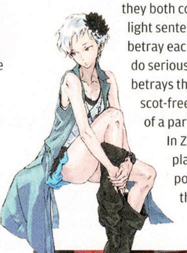
The Nintendo 3DS sequel to cult hit 999 is coming to North America by year's end.

AKSYS GAMES SHATTERED the conventional wisdom that Americans don't care about virtual novels when they released the M-rated Nintendo DS game Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors (aka 999) to great critical acclaim and better-than-expected sales. So it shouldn't be a surprise that series developer Chunsoft has entrusted the company with localizing its sequel, Zennin Shibou Desu, which fans have taken to calling Good People Die. Aksys has yet to announce the final North American title, and it probably won't be that. But whatever it does end up being called, good people are still expected to die, and probably in droves.

Following in the footsteps of its predecessor, Zennin Shibou Desu locks nine strangers together and forces them to play a series of games with life-and-death consequences. But this title has a few nasty twists that make 999's murderous escapades look like little more than a spirited game of duck, duck, goose.

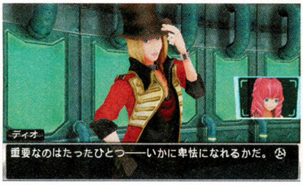
Most significantly, Zennin Shibou Desu is built around the classic "prisoner's dilemma" thought experiment, in which two criminals who have been separated have to decide whether to trust each other to keep quiet or betray each other. If they both cooperate they'll get light sentences, and if they both betray each other they'll both do serious time. But if only one betrays the other, he'll get off scot-free while his poor dope of a partner rots in jail.

In Zennin Shibou Desu, players need to earn nine points to escape with their lives. Everyone will earn points slowly and steadily if they always cooperate, but if one player betrays a cooperating partner, he'll gain extra points at the partner's expense, possibly dooming the partner to a brutal death if he falls below a certain point threshold. Can you betray the characters who are depending on you? Will you end up betrayed by a character you grow to love? The choices—and consequences—are all up to you. The storyline of Zennin Shibou Desu branches far more often than its predecessor's; it features 24 possible endings.



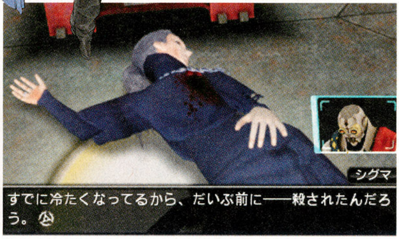
Like 999, Zennin Shibou Desu alternates between character dialogue and interactive puzzle rooms in which players explore their surroundings and piece together the mysteries of how and why they ended up in this mess. But instead of still pictures communicating via written text, the characters are now polygonally modeled, voiced by actors, and animated in stereoscopic 3D.

We'll be back with more details in the months to come, and you probably won't have to wait long; Aksys plans to have the game in stores by the end of 2012. That should be just enough time for anyone who ignored 999 to pick up a copy and play it while the rest of us brush up on the delicate art of betrayal. **—CASEY L.**



ディオ

重要なのはたったひとつ——いかに卑怯になれるかだ。



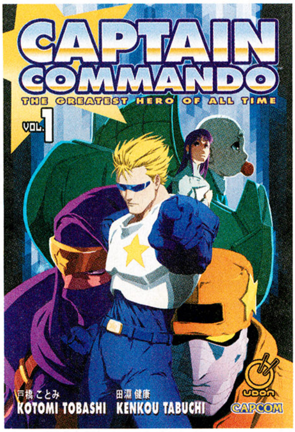
シグマ

すでに冷たくなってるから、だいぶ前に——殺されたんだろう。

SCREENSHOTS FROM JAPANESE VERSION OF THE GAME

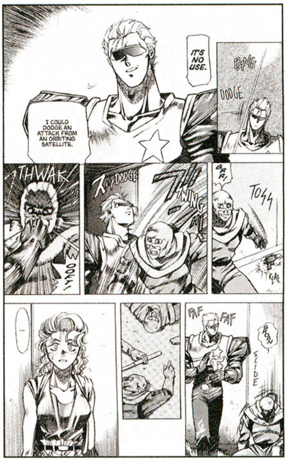
Going Commando

Classic hero **Captain Commando** enters the world of manga.



EVER HEARD OF Captain Commando? He hasn't seen much action recently, but back in the 8-bit days he was Capcom's official mascot before going on to star in a self-titled arcade beat-'em-up in 1991 (which hit the Super NES in 1995) and appear in a handful of other titles (such as Marvel vs. Capcom). Now the good captain is set to step back into the limelight in the *Captain Commando* manga published by Udon Entertainment.

The manga, based on Captain Commando's arcade adventures, is a retro-style superhero story that tells of the captain's fight against the criminal thugs of Metro City in the year 2026. Assisted by his allies Ginzu (a Bushin-ryu ninja), Mack the Knife (an alien who disguises himself as a mummy), and Baby-Head (a genius-inventor baby who pilots a bipedal robot), the hero must use his peerless fighting skills and advanced technology—such as his Energy Gloves and Captain Boots—to keep the citizens safe from the evil mastermind Scumocide. However, Captain Commando will also have to keep an eye on well-intentioned reporter Sarah Kisaragi, who's determined to get the scoop on the hero's secret identity.



Can Scumocide be defeated? Will Captain Commando's secrets be exposed? And how does a baby become a genius inventor, anyway? You'll get to find out when *Captain Commando Vol. 1* is released this spring. **—CHRIS H.**

Iwata Reveals New Plans

NEWS from JAPAN

A new Super Mario game for Nintendo 3DS, downloadable content for certain titles, and personal accounts for Wii U are on the way.

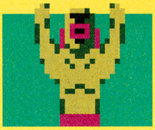
IN A PRESENTATION for investors, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata announced two new things that should excite all Nintendo fans. The first is "a totally new side-scrolling action Super Mario in 2D" that Iwata says is "a key title for the Nintendo 3DS in the next fiscal year." No further details were revealed, but the very fact that such a game is in the works has us stoked.

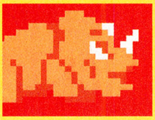
The second announcement is in regard to the Nintendo Network, an online service that allows for "competitions and communication among users, as well as the sales of digital content." Iwata cites the community aspect in Mario Kart 7 as an example of the Nintendo Network in action, as players can create and join communities in which the rules of the races can be customized. In addition, downloadable add-on content for certain (currently Japanese-only) N3DS titles is on the way, and there is "the future possibility of digital distribution of packaged software" for both N3DS and Wii U. Speaking of Nintendo's next console, Wii U will support personal accounts with the Nintendo Network, allowing family members to have separate accounts on a single system, for instance.

It's yet to be determined when all of this stuff will launch, but keep your eyes on these pages for updates. **—JUSTIN C.**

A WINNER IS...

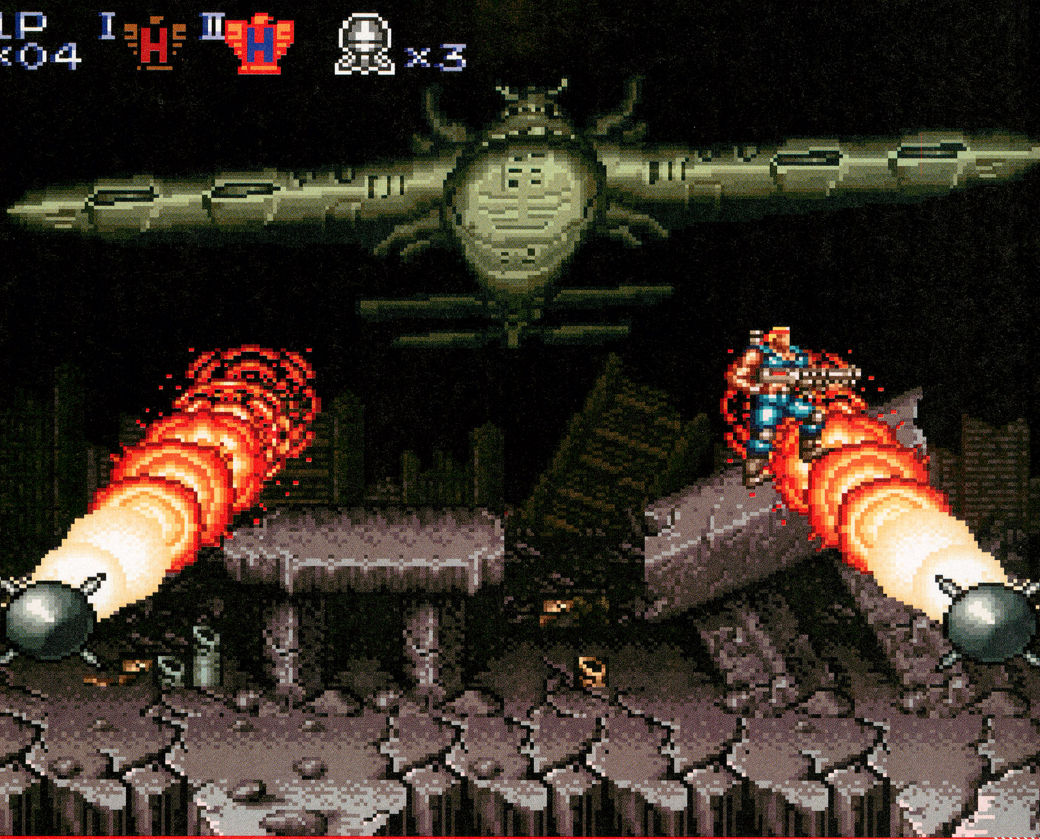
The reduced $40 price of Resident Evil: Revelations.





DODONGO DISLIKES...

Cheaters on Maka Wuhu in Mario Kart 7.



THAT WAS AWESOME!

OUR FAVORITE VIDEO GAME MOMENTS

MISSILES INCOMING!

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS, SUPER NES, 1992

> “In the days of Mode 7, before stereoscopic 3D, nothing was more impressive than when that plane flew out of the screen, fired its missiles, and set the level ablaze.”
>
> —CHRIS H.

STAR POWER

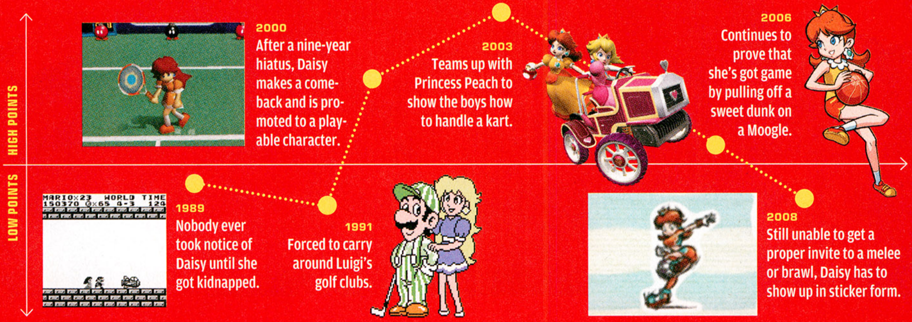
A closer look at the characters we love

Daisy

FIRST APPEARANCE:
SUPER MARIO LAND
GAMEBOY, 1989

Don't write her off as "the other princess"—Daisy has proven that she's got what it takes to be a star.

CAREER GRAPH



1989
Nobody ever took notice of Daisy until she got kidnapped.

1991
Forced to carry around Luigi's golf clubs.

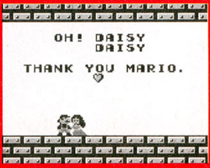
2000
After a nine-year hiatus, Daisy makes a comeback and is promoted to a playable character.

2003
Teams up with Princess Peach to show the boys how to handle a kart.

2006
Continues to prove that she's got game by pulling off a sweet dunk on a Moogle.

2008
Still unable to get a proper invite to a melee or brawl, Daisy has to show up in sticker form.

OUR FAVORITE DAISY GAMES


OH! DAISY
DAISY
THANK YOU MARIO.

Super Mario Land

GAME BOY, 1989

The world was first introduced to Princess Daisy when she was kidnapped by the alien overlord Tatanga. She is rescued when Mario travels to her kingdom of Sarasaland and challenges the otherworldly menace. After her liberation, Daisy takes up residence in the Mushroom Kingdom.

Mario Power Tennis

GAMECUBE, 2004

Daisy's first appearance as a playable character was in Mario Tennis for the Nintendo 64. It's in this sequel, however, that she really gets to shine. As a technique-focused character, she can easily hit the ball to the corners of the court—well out of her opponents' range. Her Wonder Flower Power Shot move can also knock other players off-balance.

DAISY WINS 10 - 7
DAISY WINS SERIES 1-0

Mario Strikers Charged

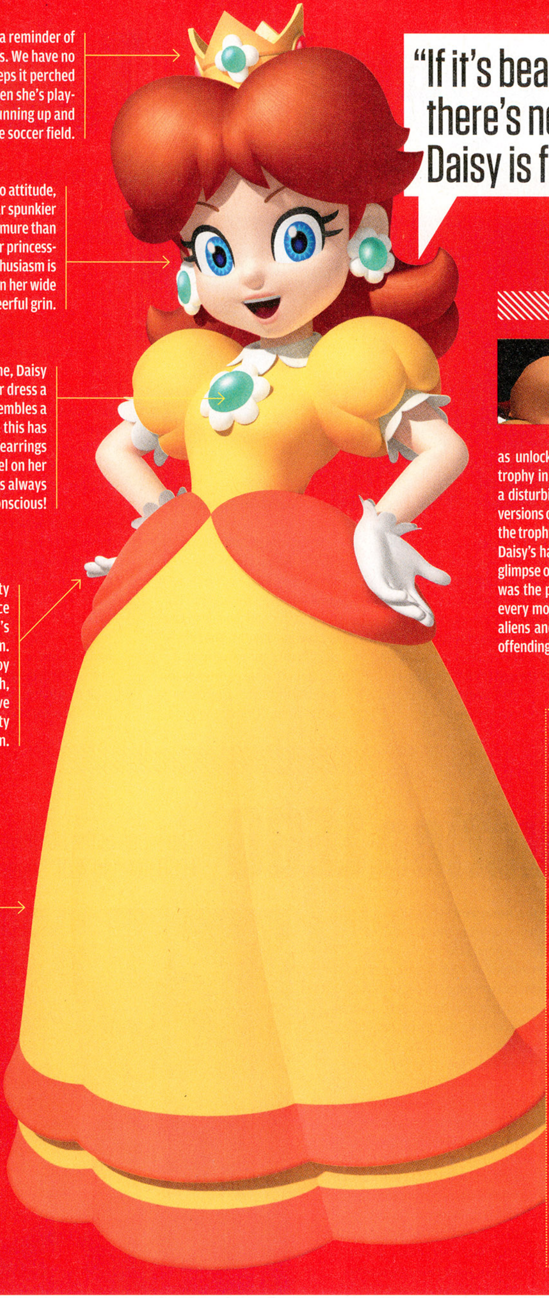
Wii, 2007

Who wears short shorts? Princess Daisy wears short shorts—and a midriff-revealing top, too. Hubba-hubba! Her saucy outfit isn't the only reason that Daisy makes this soccer game so much fun, though. Her devastating Crystal Smash special move causes giant crystals to burst out of the ground, stunning any rivals in her vicinity.

Mario Kart 7

NINTENDO 3DS, 2011

As an unlockable lightweight character in the latest Mario Kart title, Daisy has excellent acceleration and provides a significant off-road stat boost to whatever custom kart you design, but to be honest her greatest skill in the game is her taunting laugh. Her overly cheerful "Ha! Ha!" will make your opponents' blood boil as you pass them.



Daisy's crown is a reminder of her royal status. We have no idea how she keeps it perched on her head when she's playing tennis or running up and down the soccer field.

When it comes to attitude, Daisy is far spunkier and less demure than Nintendo's other princesses. Her perky enthusiasm is always evident in her wide eyes and cheerful grin.

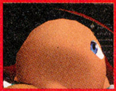
True to her name, Daisy wears on her dress a brooch that resembles a daisy. Of course, this has to match her earrings and the jewel on her crown. Daisy is always fashion-conscious!

These dainty gloves look nice and keep Daisy's hands warm. Given her tomboy nature, though, we're sure they've gotten plenty dirty on occasion.

A long, flowing dress like this certainly makes Daisy look princessy, but it's hardly a suitable outfit for playing sports. This athletic gal keeps a shorter dress and a pair of shorts ready for when she's working out.

"If it's beauty you want, then there's no need to prove it—Daisy is fairest of all!"

MARIO PARTY 3
NINTENDO 64, 2001



DAISY SEES ALL

Although Daisy has yet to appear in the Smash Bros. series as a playable character, she has had a couple of trophies in the games as unlockable bonuses. Much to our surprise, the Daisy trophy in Super Smash Bros. Melee for GameCube reveals a disturbing truth about the Sarasaland princess. In early versions of the title, players could manipulate the camera in the trophy-viewer mode so that it became wedged between Daisy's hair and the back of her head. As a result we got a glimpse of a third hidden eye behind Daisy's right ear. What was the purpose of this extra eye? Was it to watch Luigi's every move? Maybe she used it to stay aware of villainous aliens and reptiles. We may never know the truth, as the offending optic was removed in later versions of the game.

HOLLYWOOD HEROINE

Just how important is Daisy in the Mario universe? Well, that sure ain't Princess Peach starring in the live-action Super Mario Bros. movie! It's true. The female lead in the 1993 film was Princess Daisy as portrayed by Samantha Mathis. This version of Daisy is an archeology student from Brooklyn who is unaware that she is really the daughter of the king of a parallel dimension where humans evolved from dinosaurs. When her home dimension's current leader, King Koopa, sends his henchmen to kidnap Daisy, Mario and Luigi rush to save her. Together, the trio defeats Koopa and returns peace to the land. As alluded to in the video games, Daisy and Luigi form a friendship that blossoms into romance.

Legendary Tunes

Revisit the unforgettable music from the **Legend of Zelda** series in concert and at home.

WHETHER IT'S playing the recorder in the original Legend of Zelda or strumming the Goddess's Harp in Skyward Sword, music has always been an integral component of the Zelda games. Fans now have a couple of new ways to connect to the classic musical themes from the beloved series: a Zelda-themed concert tour and collections of sheet music.

The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses is the title of the concert tour, which will be playing in multiple cities throughout the United States and Canada for the next several months. The title refers to the four-movement symphony that takes listeners on a journey through A Link to the Past, Ocarina of Time, The Wind Waker, and Twilight Princess. Additionally, concertgoers will be treated to orchestral renditions of music from Zelda titles such as Link's Awakening and Majora's Mask. Eimear Noone conducts the Symphony of the Goddesses orchestra and arrangements are by music director Chad Seiter. For more information and a schedule of upcoming performances, visit http://zelda-symphony.com.

Those who are musically inclined will want to check out Alfred Music Publishing's new sheet-music book, The Legend of Zelda Series. This volume contains 33 arrangements of memorable tunes from 11 entries in the Zelda franchise. Catering to two instruments and various skill levels, there are versions for guitar, easy piano, and intermediate-advanced piano. The first two are $16.99 each and the latter is $19.99. All versions are available in both physical and digital formats, and they can be found at www.alfred.com.—**PHIL T.**

Justice LEGO

The studs of the DC universe unite in **LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes.**

BATMAN'S HOMETOWN has always been a hotbed of crime, but things get even worse for the good citizens of Gotham when the infamous Joker teams up with the nefarious Lex Luthor to cause mass chaos and destruction. Such a threat might be too much for even Batman to handle, but luckily he's not alone in the upcoming LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes. Friends like Superman, Wonder Woman, and Green Lantern join the Caped Crusader and his sidekick Robin as they fight to save the day. The Dynamic Duo has a variety of suits and gadgets such as Batman's Power Suit and Robin's Power Cannon to help even the odds, and the additional heroes bring with them never-before-seen abilities, such as flight, super-breath, and heat vision. There are also vehicles to pilot, including the Batmobile and the Batwing. LEGO Batman 2 comes to Wii, DS, and N3DS this summer. —**PHIL T.**

POWER QUIZ

EASY

What Nintendo arcade game featured Mario as the villain?

AVERAGE

What Nintendo arcade cabinet gave gamers a selection of 10 different NES games to play?

HARDCORE

What two Punch-Out!! adversaries appeared only in the game's original arcade release?

PUNCH-OUT!!
Nintendo

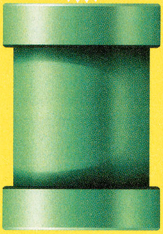
ANSWERS

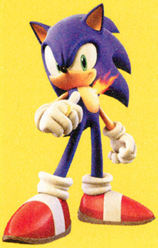
EASY: Donkey Kong Junior; AVERAGE: PlayChoice-10; HARDCORE: Kid Quick and Pizza Pasta

WARP ZONE

What we were writing about way back when

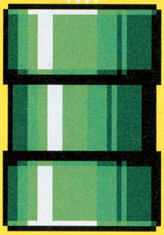
5 YEARS AGO





Sonic returned to the cover of Nintendo Power in March 2007 to hype his Wii arrival in Sonic and the Secret Rings. Inspired by the Arabian Nights stories and utilizing motion controls, the game was quite unlike any previous Sonic title. The issue also offered preview coverage of titles such as Super Paper Mario, Mario Party 8, Wario: Master of Disguise, and Final Fantasy VI Advance, plus a pull-out Super Smash Bros. Brawl calendar.

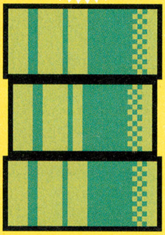
10 YEARS AGO

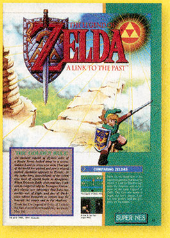


It's a common occurrence now, but in March 2002 many Nintendo Power readers were probably shocked beyond recovery to find Sonic the Hedgehog—once Nintendo's bitter enemy—gracing the cover. Equally surprising was a feature on former PlayStation mascot Crash Bandicoot, who was making his Game Boy Advance debut. Fortunately, Mario was represented (in a strategy article on the GBA version of Super Mario World), thus assuring fans they had not picked up the wrong magazine.

NBA STREET PLAYS HERE
NINTENDO POWER
SONIC ADVENTURE 2 BATTLE

20 YEARS AGO




THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
A LINK TO THE PAST
COMPARING ZELDAS
SUPER NES

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past was not the only game released in the spring of 1992, but for many gamers it was the only one that mattered. The March issue of Nintendo Power contained a 15-page cover story on the game, detailing Link's weapons, items, and equipment and providing complete coverage of the Light World portion of Link's quest, from his harrowing venture into Hyrule Castle until Agahnim's defeat. The first part of the Dark World was explored, as well.

ULTIMATE CARD GAMES
11 Classic Games
Hearts • Spades
Euchre • Canasta
Bridge • more
20 Solitaire Games
FreeCell • Klondike
Golf • Yukon • Spider
Pyramid • many more
13 Casino Games
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5-Card Draw • 7-Card Stud • Blackjack
Crazy Pineapple • 5 Video Poker • more
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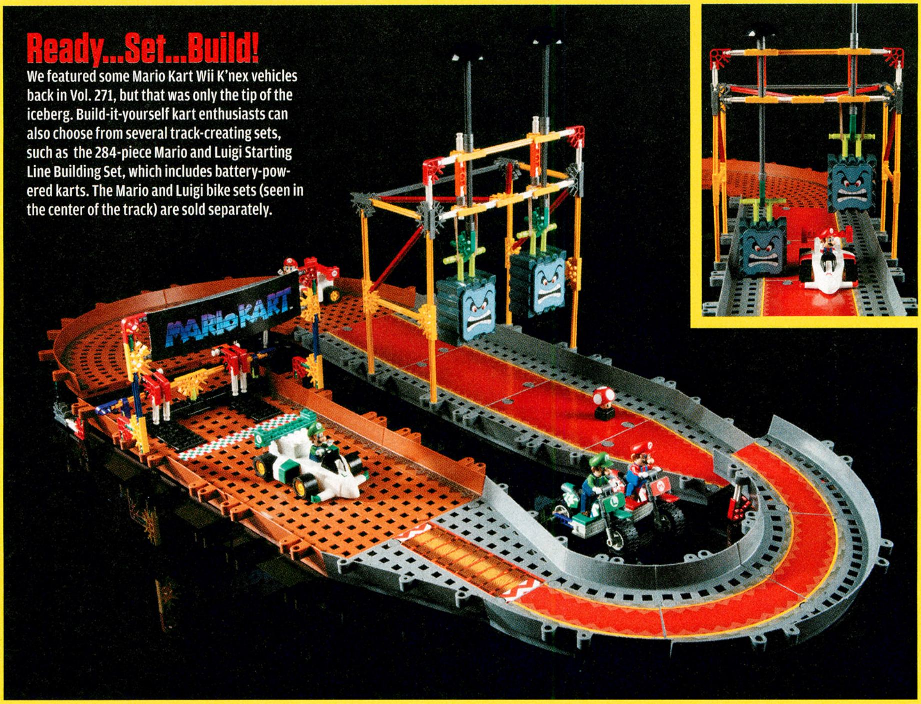
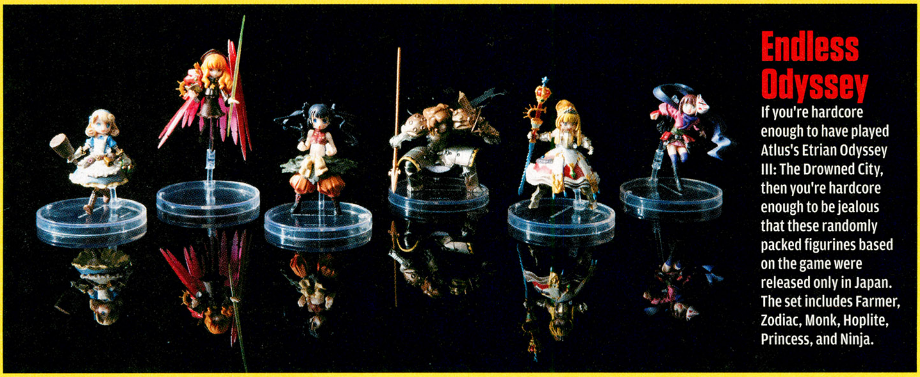


Ready...Set...Build!

We featured some Mario Kart Wii K'nex vehicles back in Vol. 271, but that was only the tip of the iceberg. Build-it-yourself kart enthusiasts can also choose from several track-creating sets, such as the 284-piece Mario and Luigi Starting Line Building Set, which includes battery-powered karts. The Mario and Luigi bike sets (seen in the center of the track) are sold separately.



Endless Odyssey

If you're hardcore enough to have played Atlus's Etrian Odyssey III: The Drowned City, then you're hardcore enough to be jealous that these randomly packed figurines based on the game were released only in Japan. The set includes Farmer, Zodiac, Monk, Hoplite, Princess, and Ninja.

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GAME FORECAST

READERS' MOST WANTED

Vote for your favorites at
www.nintendopower.com/polls

Wii

1. Xenoblade Chronicles
2. The Amazing Spider-Man
3. Men in Black
4. MLB 2K12
5. Karaoke Joysound

Wii U

1. Batman: Arkham City
2. LEGO City Stories
3. Ninja Gaiden III: Razor's Edge
4. Tekken*
5. Darksiders II

NINTENDO 3DS

1. Paper Mario*
2. Luigi's Mansion 2
3. Kid Icarus: Uprising
4. Animal Crossing*
5. Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance

Wii

The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	7/12
Combat Wings: The Great Battles of WWII	City	6/12
El Chavo	Slang	TBA
Karaoke Joysound	Konami	Q1 12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
Men in Black	Activision	5/12
Skylanders: Giants	Activision	FALL 12
Xenoblade Chronicles	Nintendo	4/12

Wii U

Aliens: Colonial Marines	Sega	TBA
Batman: Arkham City	Warner Bros.	TBA
Darksiders II	THQ	TBA
Killer Freaks from Outer Space	Ubisoft	TBA
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	TBA
Metro: Last Light	THQ	TBA
Ninja Gaiden III: Razor's Edge	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Pikmin*	Nintendo	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Tekken*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Online	Ubisoft	TBA

NINTENDO DS

The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	7/12
El Chavo	Slang	TBA
Famous	SouthPeak	TBA
Gogo's Crazy Bones	GameMill	3/12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
Men in Black	Activision	5/12
Sesame Street: Elmo's Musical Monsterpiece	Warner Bros.	TBA

NINTENDO 3DS

The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	7/12
Angler's Club: Ultimate Bass Fishing 3D	D3	2012
Animal Crossing*	Nintendo	TBA
BloodRayne: The Shroud	Majesco	TBA
Boulder Dash XL 3D	Giant	TBA
A Boy and His Blob	Majesco	TBA
Carnival Games Wild West 3D	Take-Two	TBA
Chevy Camaro: Wild Ride	Storm City	TBA
Chocobo Racing 3D*	Square Enix	TBA
Contra*	Konami	TBA
Crash-City GP	Rocket	TBA
de Blob 2	THQ	TBA
Dragon Ball*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Dragon Quest*	Square Enix	TBA
Dynasty Warriors*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Etrian Odyssey*	Atlus	TBA
Final Fantasy*	Square Enix	TBA
Fractured Soul: Deep Void	Ignition	SUM 12
Good People Die*	Aksys	2012
Gundam*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Heroes of Ruin	Square Enix	SPR 12
Horses 3D	Ubisoft	3/12
Kid Icarus: Uprising	Nintendo	3/12
Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance	Square Enix	2012
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	2012
Lion's Pride: Adventures in the Serengeti	Majesco	TBA
Lovely Lisa 3D	Tomy	TBA
Luigi's Mansion 2	Nintendo	2012
Mahjong 3D: Warriors of the Emperor	Giant	TBA
Martha Stewart	Majesco	TBA
Men in Black	Activision	5/12
Monster 4x4 3DS	Ubisoft	TBA
Myst	Maximum	3/12
Naruto Shippuden Action*	Tomy	TBA
Ninja Gaiden*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Paper Mario*	Nintendo	TBA
Planet Crashers 3D	Ignition	3/12
Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle*	Level-5	TBA
Puzzler World 3DS	Ubisoft	TBA
Raving Rabbids 5*	Ubisoft	TBA
Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure	Sega	2012
Shifting World	Aksys	4/12
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona*	Atlus	TBA
Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir	Nintendo	4/12
Sudoku Premier Edition	Majesco	TBA
Super Robot*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
VS-robo	Rocket	TBA
WonderWorld Amusement Park	Majesco	TBA

RED TEXT = GAMES ADDED THIS MONTH.

* TENTATIVE TITLE

NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE.

ALL NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

“★★★★★”

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THE BEST GUIDES
on the internet...
ALL IN ONE PLACE”
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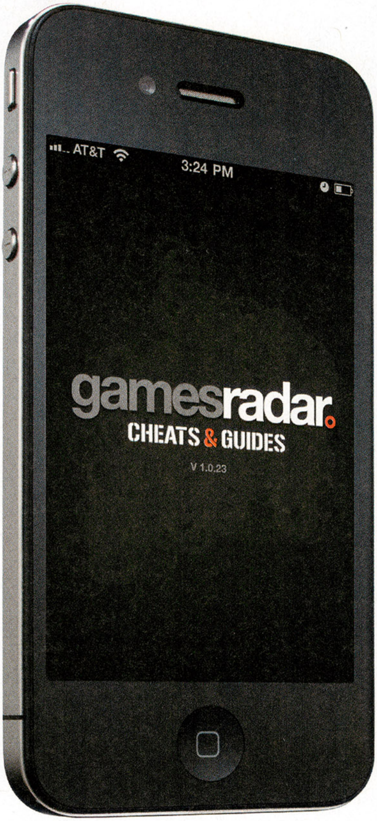
“★★★★★
Thank you GamesRadar for
FEEDING MY
ADDICTION”
by Poconoscott



“★★★★★
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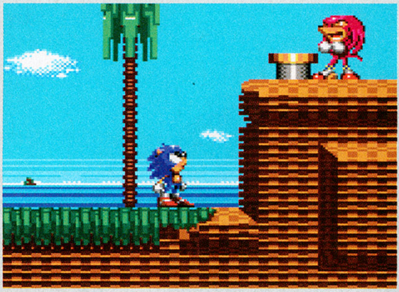
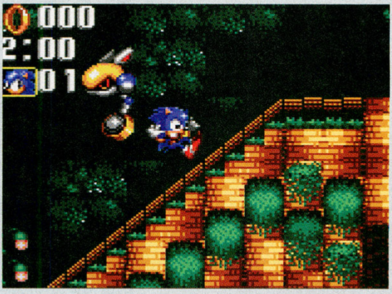
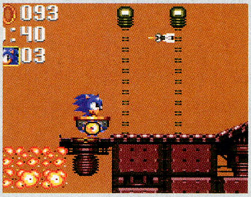
SAMURAI SWORD DESTINY
SAKURA SAMURAI: ART OF THE SWORD





[Above] Sonic learns the danger of too much speed. Curse you, evil minion!



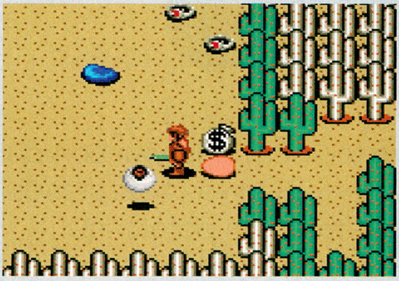
Gearing Up

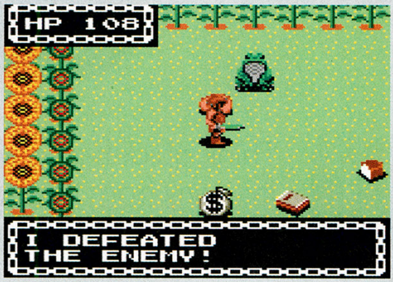
Sega's classic Game Gear titles find a new home on Nintendo 3DS Virtual Console.

THE NINTENDO 3DS Virtual Console service is about to offer games from more than just classic Nintendo systems. As first indicated by Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime at the 2011 Game Developers Conference, the Nintendo eShop will play host to Sega Game Gear titles. The Game Gear, released in North America in 1991, was one of the first portable systems that could play games in color. Three titles—Sonic the Hedgehog: Triple Trouble, Dragon Crystal, and Shinobi—are scheduled for release this spring, with others to follow.

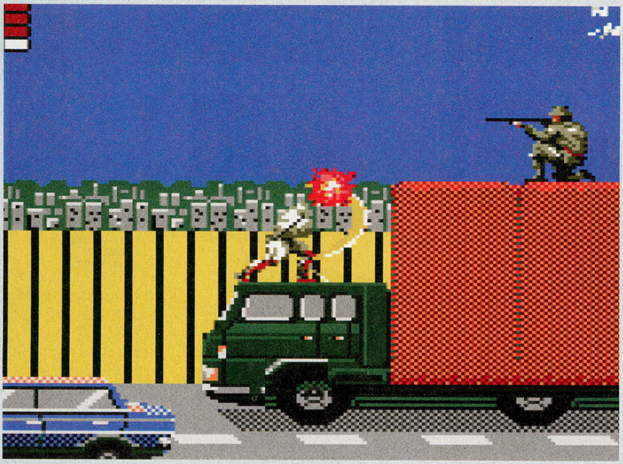
Though quite a few Sonic the Hedgehog titles appeared on Game Gear, Sega has decided to celebrate the franchise's debut on N3DS Virtual Console by releasing the fourth Sonic Game Gear entry, Sonic the Hedgehog: Triple Trouble. Yeah, we're not sure why Sega's not releasing the games in chronological order either, but we're not going to complain about more classic Sonic, no matter how it comes. In this installment you can play as either Sonic or Tails as you race against Dr. Robotnik and Knuckles to retrieve the Chaos Emeralds. Triple Trouble also marks the debut of Nack the Weasel, a treasure hunter who wants to steal the emeralds in order to sell them.

Dragon Crystal is an RPG cut from the same cloth as Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer and the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon titles for Nintendo DS. Instead of focusing on an elaborate plot, you concentrate on exploration and leveling





I DEFEATED THE ENEMY!



[Above] The top of a moving truck seems like bad positioning for a sniper. It also leaves you open to ninja attacks.

up your character. When the game begins, you find yourself on the bottom floor of a 30-level dungeon, and the goal, of course, is to reach the top before being overpowered by the seemingly endless stream of enemies. Weapons, items, and cash are scattered throughout the levels, and you'll need to hunt them down if you hope to stand a chance. The dungeons are randomly generated, giving you a new experience each time you play.

Not to be confused with the identically named game that Sega recently released for the N3DS, Shinobi for Game Gear marked the first time that the long-running ninja series appeared on a portable system. With its colorful graphics and catchy soundtrack, it was a fairly impressive debut. The game doesn't skimp on the action, either. In a series first, you can switch control between multiple ninja warriors as the game progresses. One of your shinobi brethren is trapped in each stage, and defeating the boss at the end of the level allows the previously captive shinobi to become a playable character. Swapping between the ninjas allows you to take advantage of their individual tools and skills, including a grappling hook, a double jump, bombs, and the ability to walk on water.

Although these may be the first three Game Gear titles to hit Virtual Console, they shouldn't be the last. At last year's E3, Sega mentioned upcoming releases of the racing title Sonic Drift 2 and classic puzzle game Columns. —**PHIL T.**

WHAT SHALL I DO?

I LOST 1 PT(S)!

In the Zone

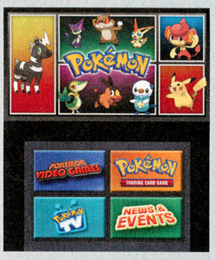
New content lands in Nintendo Zone.

nintendo zone
The Nintendo Zone service is available here.

HAVE YOU connected your Nintendo 3DS system to Nintendo Zone recently? If not, you're missing out on several new features. In addition to previously existing content such as trivia and game coupons, Nintendo Zone—which can be accessed wirelessly for free at more than 29,000 locations via an icon on your system's Home Menu—provides an easy way to download playable demos of the latest N3DS games. You need look no further than Nintendo Zone's Explore Games section to sample titles such as Mario & Sonic at the 2012 London Olympic Games and the M-rated Resident Evil: Revelations.

What's more, Nintendo Zone now features a permanent area dedicated to all things Pokémon. The exact content will change on a monthly basis, but fans can expect information, screenshots, and videos for the latest Pokémon games; updates on Pokémon events (such as special character distributions); news about the Pokémon Trading Card Game; and, perhaps best of all, full-length streaming episodes of the *Pokémon* TV series.

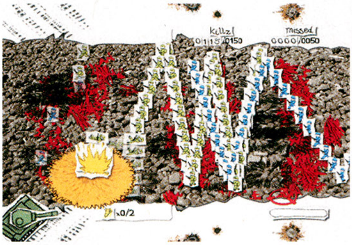
To find a location from which you can access Nintendo Zone, visit www.nintendo.com/3ds/nintendozone. —**CHRIS H.**



Pokémon comes to Nintendo Zone!

EVALUATION STATION

WiiWARE



PAPER WARS: CANNON FODDER

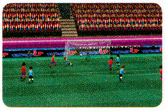
PUBLISHER: **IFUN4ALL** GENRE: **ACTION** PRICE: **500 POINTS**

At first glance Paper Wars looks like a tower-defense game, but it's actually much simpler than that. The Wii Remote is used to aim and launch missiles at a seemingly never-ending supply of enemy troops that march across the screen. Different squad formations, obstacles, and power-ups add needed variety, but that's about as complicated as it gets. For a while, though, the frantic pacing keeps things fairly interesting despite the lack of depth. The graphics, which resemble crudely drawn doodles on scraps of paper, are amusing, but the menus—which are full of "1337 speak" and backwards/upside down letters—are just infuriating.

—PHIL T.

Hmmm...

WiiWARE



SOCCER UP!

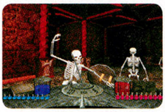
PUBLISHER: **ENJOYUP GAMES**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
PRICE: **500 POINTS**

Soccer Up! offers all the hallmarks of footie foulness: big-headed character models, dodgy physics, nonexistent AI, pointless defense, and a pervasive sense that your squad would do better if you'd simply drop your controller and walk away. Yes, the controls are so tediously inept and the action so nonplussing that players may feel like they can only hinder their team's chances. This is the game's one kindness; it's as if it whispers softly, "It's OK; you don't *have* to play me."

—PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

WiiWARE



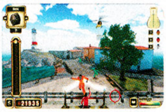
STONEKEEP: BONES OF THE ANCESTORS

PUBLISHER: **INTERPLAY**
GENRE: **RPG**
PRICE: **500 POINTS**

Interplay, for reasons unknowable, refreshes their 1995 PC game for WiiWare; in other words, it's been marginally updated and motion controls have been stuffed into it. Unfortunately, the results dishonor the limited charms of the original; if Stonekeep's devotion to ugliness and pervading sense of pointlessness don't enrage you, its combat controls—which are awful—surely will. Fortunately, your undeserved deaths yield frequent opportunities to give up entirely. —PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

WiiWARE



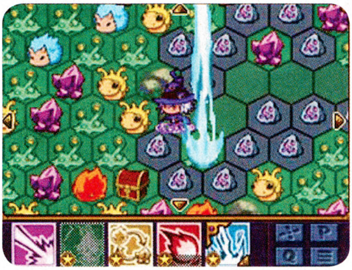
ZOMBII ATTACK

PUBLISHER: **GAMERS DIGITAL**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
PRICE: **500 POINTS**

Zombii Attack seems proud that its premise—you launch projectiles at the walking dead via a giant slingshot—is pure camp. However, humor can't compensate for the title's flaws. The frantic action might be enjoyable if the poor inventory system didn't make it nearly impossible to choose the best ammo in a timely fashion. The transition to the occasional driving minigame happens so abruptly that it seems like a glitch, and the game sports some of the ugliest graphics to appear on WiiWare. —PHIL T.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



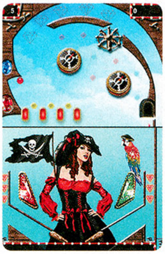
3 HEROES—CRYSTAL SOUL

PUBLISHER: **CIRCLE ENTERTAINMENT** GENRE: **PUZZLE**
PRICE: **500 POINTS/$4.99**

Circle Entertainment, known mostly for spitting out rudimentary strategy games, shifts gears to bring us a relatively complex puzzler. After choosing one of three classes—Swordsman, Mage, or Ranger, each with four unique abilities—players are deposited on a hexagonal grid littered with color-coded monsters. Ideally, players attack clusters of like beasties to meet level objectives and charge up abilities. The trick? Managing HP, which is consumed by moving and restored by collecting crystals and chests. Unfortunately, all this much-appreciated depth can't fully compensate for gameplay that is inherently repetitive. —PATRICK C.

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



101 PINBALL WORLD

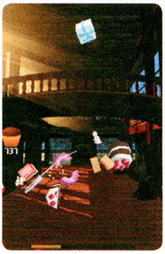
PUBLISHER: **SELECTSOFT**
GENRE: **PINBALL**
PRICE: **500 POINTS/$4.99**

101 Pinball World is the worst pinball game I've ever played. The tables are all barren and dull, and the pinball obeys no known rules of physics as it jerkily moves around the board. Glitches like the ball passing through the flippers and getting stuck on a bumper are also common.

—PHIL T.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



CAKE NINJA

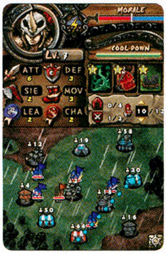
PUBLISHER: **CYPRONIA**
GENRE: **ACTION**
PRICE: **500 POINTS/$4.99**

Clearly inspired by cell-phone game Fruit Ninja, Cake Ninja requires you to use your stylus to slice up cakes and other pastries as they fly across the screen...and that's it. There's no variety and very few modes. Even for casual players, there's not enough here to justify a purchase.

—CHRIS H.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



CASTLE CONQUEROR—AGAINST

PUBLISHER: **CIRCLE ENTERTAINMENT**
GENRE: **STRATEGY**
PRICE: **200 POINTS/$1.99**

Circle, whose rapid-fire releases can be likened to a buzzing fly, shows its zeal for quantity over quality by reskinning Castle Conqueror—Revolution with a tribal theme. Needless to say, the base-capturing mediocrity isn't better when it's old hat.

—PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE

CHRONICLES OF VAMPIRES: ORIGINS

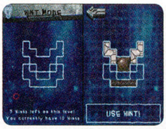
PUBLISHER: TEYON
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 500 POINTS/$4.99

Though it dresses itself in a fairly intriguing adventure tale, Chronicles of Vampires is a hidden-object game with interspersed minigames. Unfortunately, the title's potential is largely obliterated by its use of overcompressed images that aren't sufficiently detailed to support hidden-object gameplay. As a result, players will find themselves playing the "click all over" game in a desperate attempt to advance the narrative.

—PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



DOODLE FIT

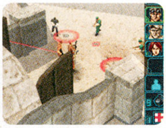
PUBLISHER: GAMELION
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 500 POINTS/$4.99

Basically a tangrams-style puzzler in which you fit together pieces of various shapes to create a larger image, Doodle Fit's claim to fame is that instead of simply grabbing and moving the pieces, you have to draw them with the stylus. This requires little to no skill and adds essentially nothing to the gameplay, but Doodle Fit nonetheless offers plenty of challenging puzzles in a wide variety of categories. It's decent but nothing special.

—CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



ELITE FORCES: UNIT 77

PUBLISHER: GAMMICK ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: 800 POINTS/$7.99

Originally released as a DS retail game, Elite Forces puts players in RTS-style control of a commando team with the usual skills: heavy weapons, hacking, sniping, and demolitions. Unfortunately, anyone expecting strategic problem-solving will be disappointed; you'll use your specialists exactly when and where you're told to, thank you. Also, please enjoy the intolerable stylus controls that preclude moving while shooting. —PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE

GAIA'S MOON

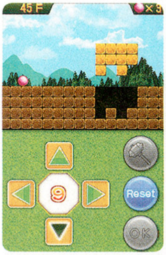
PUBLISHER: ENJOYUP GAMES
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

Gaia's Moon is a simple game. As you fly through its levels, you use a single button to control your character's vertical position so you can avoid hazards—and that's all there is to it. To call the game basic is an understatement, but the colorful visuals, catchy music, and clever enemy/obstacle placement provide some appeal. Despite its pick-up-and-play nature, however, the game is pretty tough—you get only one life and no continues.

—CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



QUICK FILL Q

PUBLISHER: AGETEC
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

Tasking players with chiseling blocks into Tetris-style puzzle pieces to fill gaps before time runs out, Quick Fill Q has a premise that sounds solid but in practice is surprisingly boring. Modes are few, and the game relies on rapid tapping more than on skill or critical thinking.

—CHRIS H.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE

ALL TIME TOP 1,000,000
PERSONAL BEST 15,211
TODAY'S TOP 15,211
Slingo!
SCORE 15,211
SPEED BONUS 300
SPINS 16 of 20
SPIN

SLINGO SUPREME

PUBLISHER: MAGELLAN INTERACTIVE
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 800 POINTS/$7.99

A luck-based number-matching game that should bore players to tears is made surprisingly addictive through the addition of unlockable power-ups, chance occurrences, combos, and "devil challenge" minigames. That said, the price is upwards of outrageous. —PATRICK C.

Hmmm...

DSiWARE

61
43 Tiles Left
x1
RETURNING

WORDJONG ARCADE

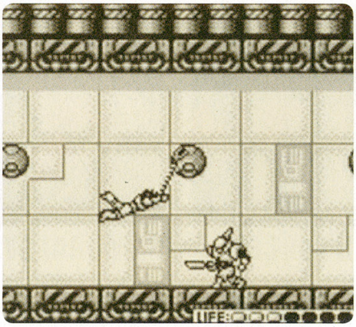
PUBLISHER: MAGELLAN INTERACTIVE
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 800 POINTS/$7.99

WordJong tasks players with spelling words from the accessible tiles in a lettered mahjong-style stack; any tiles used in a word are whisked away to expose the tiles beneath. It's a passable—though shallow—brain exercise with a price that simply can't be justified.

—PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



BIONIC COMMANDO

PLATFORM: GAME BOY **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1992 **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
GENRE: ACTION **PRICE:** $3.99

Though it's not the NES version of Bionic Commando that Virtual Console fans have been patiently waiting for, this Game Boy installment should be more than enough to tide them over. This edition has the same unique (albeit tricky) grappling-hook-based play mechanics as its console counterpart, along with well-designed levels, solid controls, and an evolving assortment of weapons and gear. It's also a heck of a lot of fun. —CHRIS H.

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE

BLASTER MASTER: ENEMY BELOW

PLATFORM: GAME BOY COLOR
ORIGINALLY RELEASED: 2000
PUBLISHER: SUNSOFT
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: $4.99

Despite looking like a simple port of its NES predecessor, Enemy Below is a whole new adventure. The free-roaming gameplay is just as exciting as ever, and new features such as character upgrades and expanded dungeons add depth and keep things fresh for veteran players. It's a tough game, though. You'll be grateful for the Virtual Console's Restore Point feature. —PHIL T.

Recommended

EVALUATION STATION

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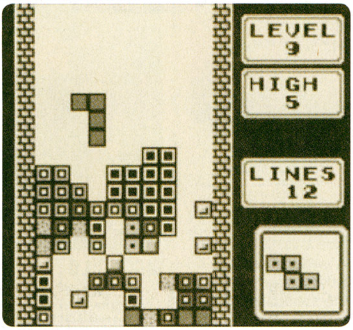
NINTENDO DSI DOWNLOAD
NINTENDO 3DS DOWNLOAD

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



TETRIS

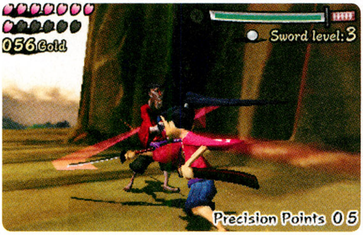
PLATFORM: GAME BOY **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1989 **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO **GENRE:** PUZZLE **PRICE:** $3.99

Phil T.'s Pick

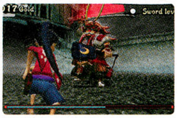
This is the version of Tetris that was included with the original Game Boy back in the day. It may be old, but it's still one of the best iterations of the falling-block puzzler. With no extra modes or enhanced features such as the hold ability, it may seem somewhat barebones, but we like to think of it as "pure." A true classic.

Recommended

N3DS DOWNLOAD



020 Gold
Sword level: 1
Precision Points 0 0



SAKURA SAMURAI: ART OF THE SWORD

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **GENRE:** ACTION **PRICE:** $6.99

Despite its heavy emphasis on swordplay, Sakura Samurai plays a lot more like Nintendo's Punch-Out!! than it does a typical hack-and-slash title. Blindly swinging with your blade will get you nowhere. (In fact, it will destroy your weapon.) Instead, you must learn how your enemies behave, dodge their moves, and then counter with your own attacks. At first this sort of reactive gameplay feels limiting, but you'll soon appreciate the added strategy that it lends to the fighting. Taking down the standard thugs does get a bit repetitive, but intense boss encounters help break up the action. The ability to upgrade your weapon adds depth, and the minigame-filled towns and unlockable challenges provide some welcome variety. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

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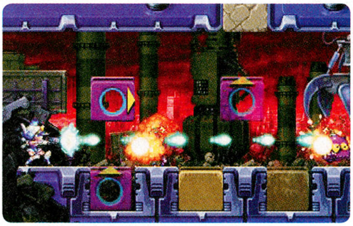


MIGHTY SWITCH FORCE!

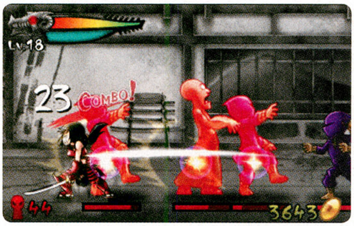
PUBLISHER: WAYFORWARD **GENRE:** ACTION **PRICE:** $5.99

Chris H.'s Pick

The latest game in WayForward's Mighty series is easily the best. Mighty Switch Force! looks ridiculously good; few 2D games in recent memory (downloadable or not) boast such impressive animation or attention to detail. In addition, the shooting, platforming, and puzzle elements seamlessly meld together in a perfect balance, delivering just the right amount of challenge via compelling level design and the simple but innovative play mechanic of shifting blocks from the foreground to the background. If I have any complaint, it's that, with only 16 stages, the game is a bit short. A few more auto-shifting boss levels would have been nice. Still, it's well worth the asking price.

Recommended

N3DS DOWNLOAD



SAMURAI SWORD DESTINY

PUBLISHER: UFO INTERACTIVE **GENRE:** ACTION **PRICE:** $5.99

Samurai Sword Destiny should be great: after all, it's a hand-drawn, 3D-enhanced, side-scrolling hack-'n'-slash action game. In actuality, however, the title is lacking. Although you have a number of combos and attacks at your disposal, you'll likely end up constantly swiping the stylus left and right across the touch screen to slice through your enemies, since that's by far the most effective maneuver in your arsenal. As you might expect, that gets old fast. Fortunately, the monotony is broken up by autoscrolling "ambush" stages in which you'll use rhythm-game-like visual cues to deflect arrows and dodge boulders; these stages are short, but fairly fun. The game also suffers from some difficulty-balance issues, and you'll likely end up replaying previously conquered stages so you can level up your hero. —**CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

ALSO AVAILABLE

On WiiWare, four games in the educational **Carmen Sandiego Adventures in Math** series are now available for 600 Wii Points each.... Recent DSiWare releases include **Anne's Doll Studio: Gothic Collection** ($4.99/500 Points), **Just Sing! Christmas Vol. 3** (200 Points/$1.99), **Word Searcher 4** (500 Points/$4.99), and two games in the Rytmik music-creation series: **Rytmik Retrobits** and **Hip Hop King: Rytmik Edition** (800 Points/$7.99 each).... For N3DS owners, a Virtual Console version of the Pac-Man-inspired **Lock'N Chase** ($2.99) is now in the eShop.

Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Step two everyone gets a controller. Step three, the **kids win.** This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

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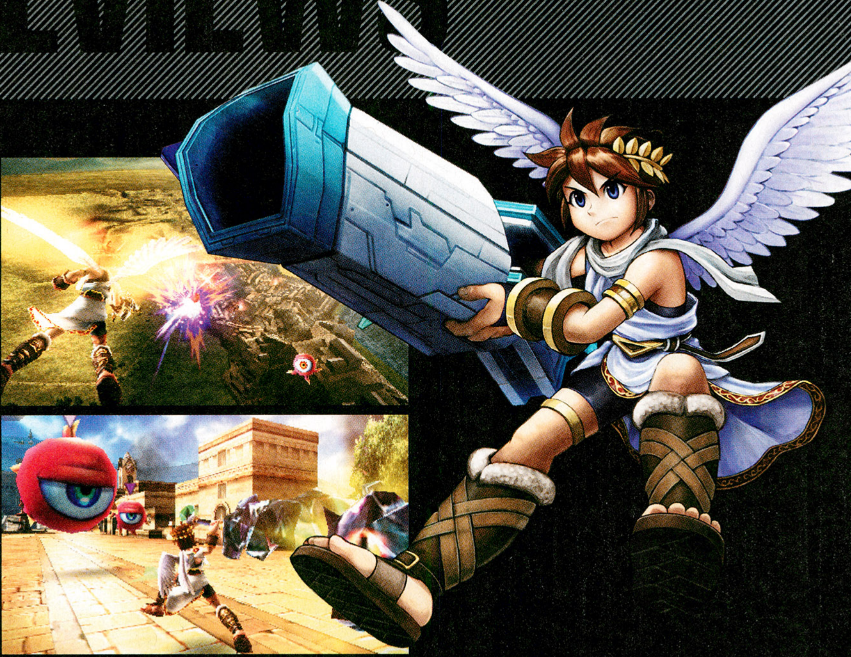


KID ICARUS: UPRISING

A propensity for intensity

LAST ISSUE'S KID ICARUS: UPRISING blowout revealed the game's massive arsenal of weapons, items, and magical powers, but was missing a few pieces of the puzzle. For instance, how will players get the weapons with the most powerful properties? What incentives will there be for players to replay the game? And what's this "unique system" that director Masahiro Sakurai promised would "address the original game's reputation for being quite challenging"?

The answer to all these questions is a new mechanic that Sakurai has named "intensity." At the beginning of each level, players are taken to a screen called the Fiend's Cauldron, where they can select the intensity of the level on a slider that ranges from 0.0 (virtually impossible to die) to 9.0 (virtually impossible to survive). The twist is that only the default difficulty level, 2.0, can be played for free. Anything higher, and you'll have to wager a cauldron full of hearts (the game's currency) on your ability to complete it. (For intensities less than 2.0, you have to pay for the privilege of taking the cakewalk.)

Wagering on higher intensity settings is a high-risk, high-reward proposition. The enemies will be more resilient and more aggressive, and deal more damage to Pit. But you'll earn more hearts for defeating them and get a bigger payday for clearing the level. More excitingly, the treasures you find within the level will be superior:

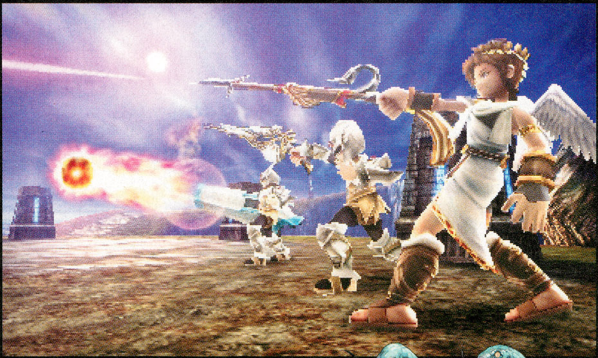
Up to six players can duke it out in Kid Icarus: Uprising's multiplayer versus mode.

although you have the same odds of finding any particular random weapon or magic power, the Fortune Bow that would have had middling stats and few if any special properties when found at a 2.0 intensity will deal more damage and offer a generous helping of special properties—things like speed boosts, extra attack/defensive power, and a chance of inflicting poison. Magic powers found at higher intensities will be higher in level, having more-powerful effects but taking up more space on your power grid.

Another reward for high-intensity play is the ability to open the Intensity Gates scattered throughout the game's chapters. Each Intensity Gate has a set level, and if you're at that level of intensity or higher when you reach it, the gate will open to reveal a new area in which you can fight difficult foes to earn additional treasures. But don't think that you can pick a high intensity level and brute-force grind your way through it; every time Pit dies and continues, he'll lose a portion of the hearts he wagers and the level's intensity will drop by a full point.

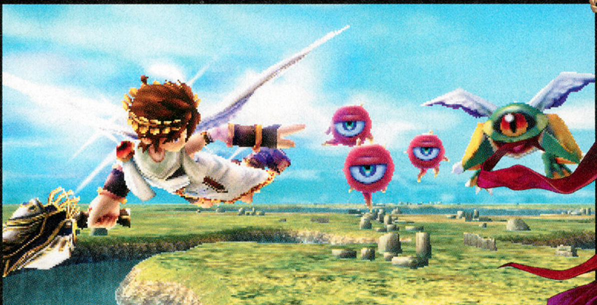
The game's multiplayer modes, which can be played locally or online, offer another incentive to hunt down high-intensity loot. The single-player and multiplayer modes are completely integrated, with each drawing from—and adding to—the same inventory of weapons and powers. While the intensity system doesn't apply to multiplayer games, the mode does provide more opportunities to earn high-quality gear. For example, at the end of each match, players are awarded bonuses (weapons, powers, hearts, etc.), and the more human players in the match, the better the spoils.

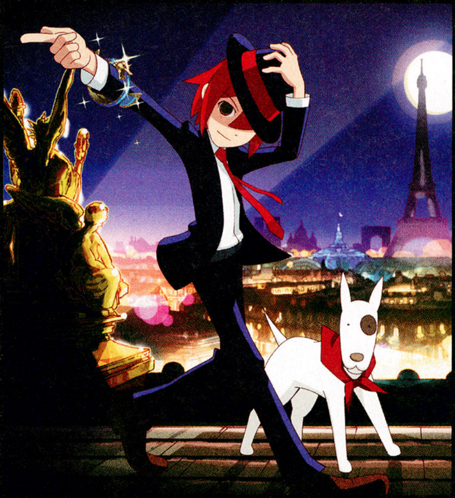
The Free-for-All mode is just like it sounds: up to six players can go at each other with whatever gear they want. The more interesting Light-vs.-Dark mode divides the players into teams of three and has them racing to drain the opposing team's shared life bar. When that life bar hits zero, the next team member to fall is reborn as either Pit or Dark Pit and given a random weapon with which to defend himself. These angel characters are powerful, but when they fall the battle is lost, so the team will have to band together to protect their leader while also gunning for the enemy angel. Players can use whatever equipment they want in this mode, including multiplayer-exclusive magic powers such as Playing Dead, which allows its user to appear to fall over defeated when in fact he's become temporarily invisible in order to sneak around the foe who had attempted to kill him. But using your high-level gear in this mode comes at a price: the better your weapon, the more you will deplete your team's life bar when you die.

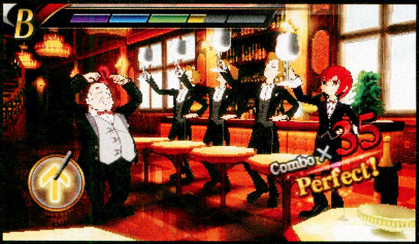


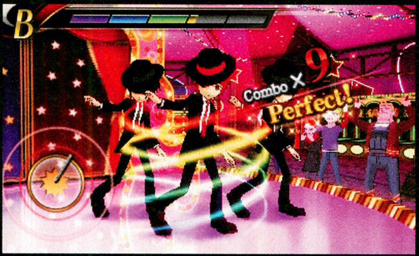
What at first appeared to be a straightforward action title is shaping up to be a game with a great deal of depth. —CASEY L.

N3DS PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **PROJECT SORA**
RELEASE: **MARCH 2012**









RHYTHM THIEF & THE EMPEROR'S TREASURE

Now you're cookin'!

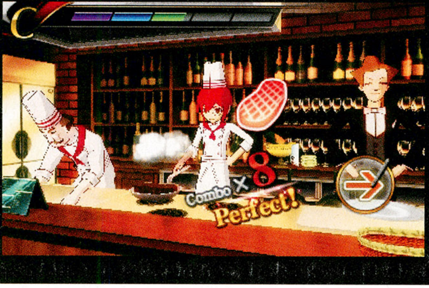
IF YOU'VE BEEN following our Rhythm Thief coverage over the last few issues, then you already know that this musical adventure is shaping up to be one of the most promising original titles on the Nintendo 3DS handheld. You also know that the game stars a young man named Raphael—also known as Phantom R—who's using his thieving talents and slick dancing skills to solve the mysterious disappearance of his father and thwart the diabolical plans of an apparently back-from-the-dead Napoleon Bonaparte.

But did you know that there's more to Raphael than smooth moves and a penchant for criminal shenanigans? It turns out he's a master of the culinary arts, as well. Early in the game Raphael has the opportunity to take on a job as a short-order cook, and like everything else in Rhythm Thief, that unfolds as a musical activity. As various types of food are thrown across the screen, you must tap the touch screen to catch the food in your frying pan, hold the stylus against the screen for a second or so to cook the food (the amount of time varies depending on the type), then slide the stylus to pass the food onto a plate—all to the beat, of course. Later on Raphael must pose as a waiter when he's trying to obtain a precious pendant. Doing so requires you to rhythmically slide the stylus up, down, or sideways so you can pour and serve drinks to customers while maintaining etiquette.

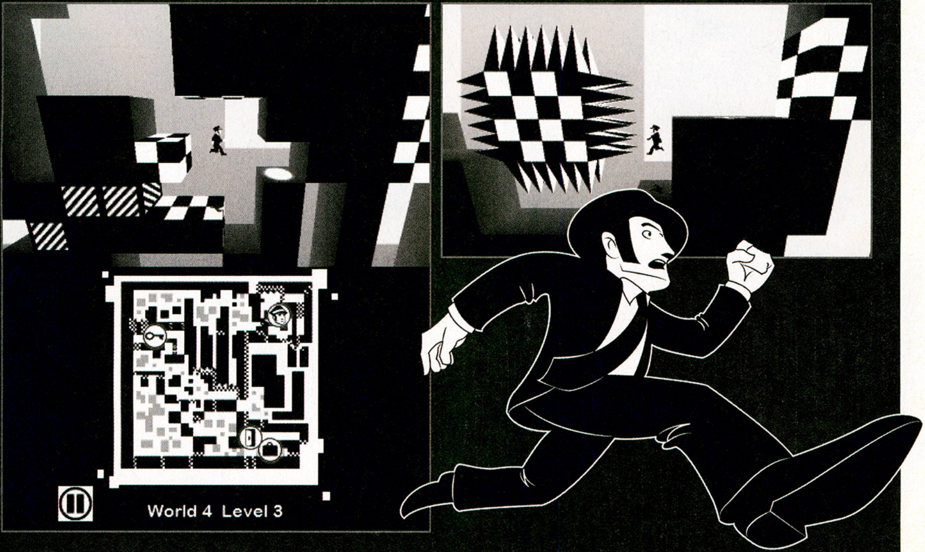
Naturally, not everything is so proper. Rhythm Thief features several stages that pay respect to vintage Sega games. We've previously shown images of the maraca-shaking level inspired by Samba de Amigo, but it turns out there's a second maraca stage that features music from DS launch title Feel the Magic XY/XX. Additionally, there are opportunities to face off against a faux Phantom R; when you do so, the gameplay and sound effects become very similar to those of Sega's classic rhythm title Space Channel 5.

These are only a few examples of what Rhythm Thief has on offer; with exploration elements, numerous puzzles, and nearly 50 stages, the game promises to be as varied and deep as it is fun.
—**CHRIS H.**

N3DS PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
RELEASE: **SPRING 2012**



WHERE CAN YOU FIND THIS MANY GREEN CAPS?

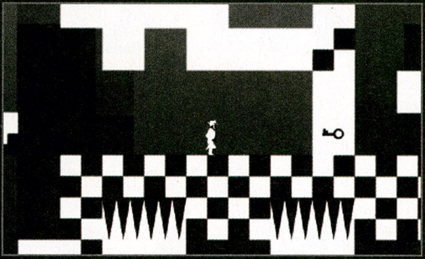


SHIFTING WORLD

Black and white and crazy all over

THE NAMELESS PROTAGONIST of Shifting World is having an odd day. His routine seemed typical at first, but things took a turn for the weird when he received a letter from the enigmatically named Duke of Shadows. The letter invited him to what appeared to be an abandoned mansion, but behind the front door he encountered a parallel dimension!

This monochromatic alternate universe—evidently the duke's personal playground—is a place where the normal rules of reality don't apply. Though the environments are initially composed of white open spaces and black solid spaces, on a whim you can "shift" the world by pressing the L or R Button. When you do so, the world turns upside down, and the black spaces open up while the white spaces become solid. Walls may become passageways, and gaping holes can become floors. Furthermore, an obstacle may transform into an easily leapable gap, and if you're in a deep pit you'll suddenly find yourself atop a tall platform. Only by shifting the world back and forth to take advantage of such tricks will you be able to overcome each stage's cerebral platforming challenges and reach the exit.


The action takes on a new dimension when you learn to shift from 2D to 3D.

That's only the beginning, however. As you proceed through the game's 60 levels you'll encounter added complexity, such as checkered blocks that are unaffected by shifting, keys that unlock new areas, and numbered blocks that bar your path until you shift through a floor marked with the same numeral. There are also warp portals that allow you to instantly move from solid to open environments without flipping the world upside down, and even special suitcases that grant you the power to shift the world from 3D to 2D (thus bringing background elements into the foreground) much like in Sega's Crush 3D. Of course, there are hazards as well—primarily rows upon rows of deadly spikes.

Surviving it all will test both your mind and your reflexes, but platforming enthusiasts probably wouldn't want it any other way.
—**CHRIS H.**

N3DS PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **FISHING CACTUS**
RELEASE: **APRIL 2012**

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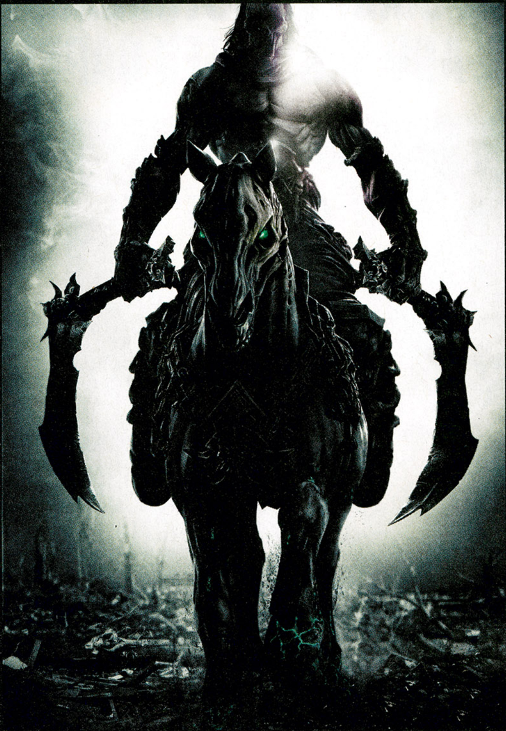
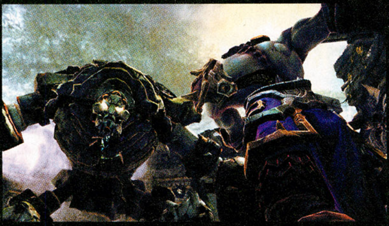




Please note that screenshots may not represent the final Wii U version of Darksiders II.

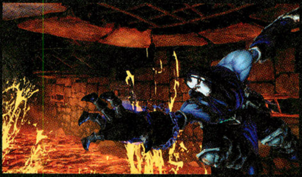
DARKSIDERS II

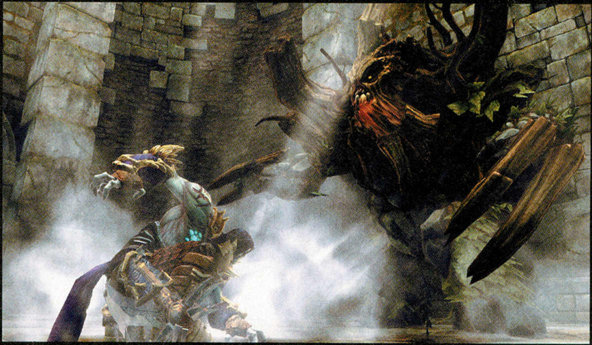
Don't fear the reaper.

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE the world is coming to an end this December, but in Wii U launch title Darksiders II, doomsday is already here. According to Death, however, that's ahead of schedule, so he has decided to stop Armageddon and uncover those responsible for kicking it off early by hacking and slashing his way to the truth.

Clearly, this isn't the grim reaper you might be familiar with from other media. Like his fellow horseman of the apocalypse, War—the protagonist of the original, Mature-rated Darksiders, which was never released on a Nintendo platform—this version of Death springs forth from the mind of comic-book creator and Vigil Games creative director Joe Madureira. Darksiders II producer Ryan Stefanelli explains, "The one approach we always took to Darksiders was a comic-book version of the horsemen of the apocalypse. We kind of divorced it from serious biblical ties.... It's more X-Men horsemen of the apocalypse than biblical horsemen of the apocalypse. It's really all Joe's vision for how the horsemen would exist in a fantasy world and a comic-book world."

With that in mind, Vigil Games has created a Death that is "about agility, attitude, and arrogance," Stefanelli tells us. "He's all about doing things quickly and with fluidity. He's very smooth and elegant. While he's flowing through the environment, he has a very feral and visceral combat style. You see him flipping around in combat because he doesn't block. He only dodges, so all of his defensive maneuvering comes through dodging." This spryness was made evident in the presentation

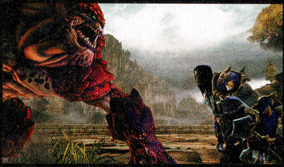


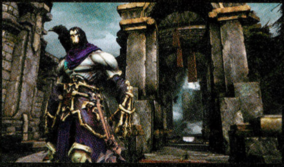


we were given as Death made his way through a vast stone-and-lava-filled area (which we were told was just a side dungeon off the main critical path). Here the horseman encounters a number of rocklike mechanical enemies called Constructs. Living up to his grim-reaper moniker, he dispatches the foes using his two scythes, one in each hand. In addition to these instruments of destruction, this pale rider can equip a secondary weapon such as a massive hammer. Naturally, he doesn't rely solely on melee combat; he also has a pistol to hit distant targets. (The pistol belongs to his brother, Strife, which is this game's version of the horseman Conquest/Pestilence.)

For your troubles, you are rewarded with experience points and the occasional piece of armor. The former can be used in the two skill trees: Harbinger (physical) and Necromancer (magic). Our demo was Necromancer-focused, so Death could use the Exhume and Murder summon abilities, allowing him to summon a handful of zombies or a flock of crows that attack nearby opponents. The pieces of armor you can acquire are divided into three categories: Necromancer, Slayer, and Wanderer. Necromancer armor helps boost your spellcasting, Slayer is strong but heavy, and Wanderer is light enough that you can move around quickly.

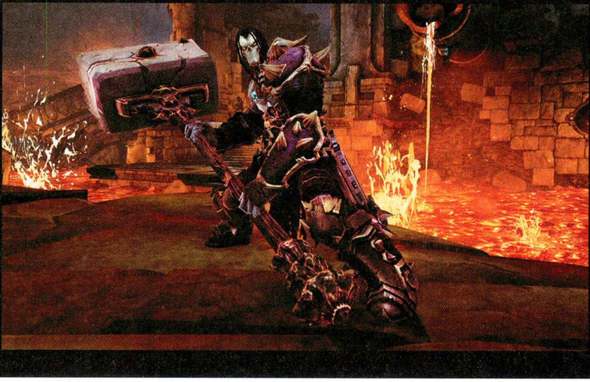
No matter which way you choose to customize him, though, Death is always acrobatic. He can run along walls, tightrope-walk across lengths of chain, and grab onto objects with his grappling hook-like Ghost Hand. These mechanics let the horseman reach new areas at a quick, Prince of Persia-style pace. This seems to be a reaction to the comparatively plodding gameplay of the first Darksiders, which starred the hulking War, who, Stefanelli says, "was about power and momentum and brutality." On the other hand, Death is "a lot quicker and nimbler than War is, so he can flip off things...vault over things—stuff War wouldn't or couldn't do because he's just not that kind of guy." In short, Death is a lean, mean killing machine—and we can't wait to see what else he can do. —**JUSTIN C.**





[Above] Death's raven, Dust, gives you hints by flying around important locations.

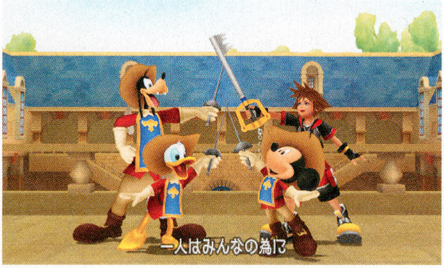
Wii U **PUBLISHER:** THQ
DEVELOPER: VIGIL GAMES
RELEASE: TBA

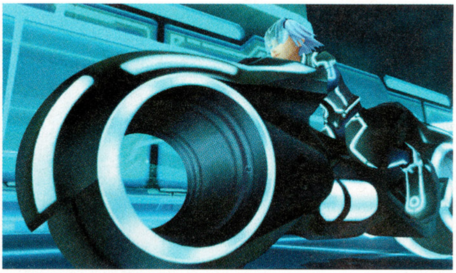


LIFE AND DEATH

Since the main character is the embodiment of Death, you would expect that he wouldn't be able to die. Of course, that throws a wrench into the gameplay experience. To address that, producer Ryan Stefanelli says, "Initially when you start playing, you can't die, but then something happens when players start playing the game that allows them to see how he's made mortal. Kind of like the way that War was [in the original Darksiders], because they're all basically immortal since they're horsemen of the apocalypse. They all go through some sort of transformation or conflict that puts them in harm's way." Whatever it is that can make Death mortal is certainly no joke. And given that the developers referred to the enormous bosses we saw in the demo as only "minibosses," it's clear that the odds are stacked heavily against this grim reaper.

BY **STEVE THOMASON** PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX** DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX** RELEASE: **2012** **N3DS**

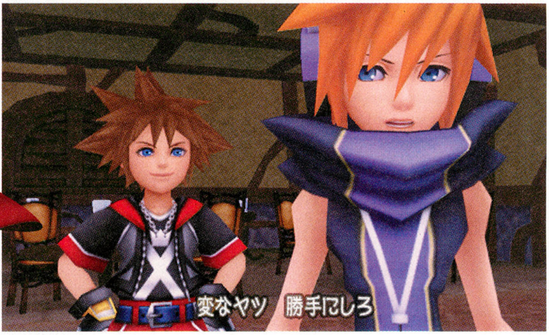




What Dreams Are Made Of

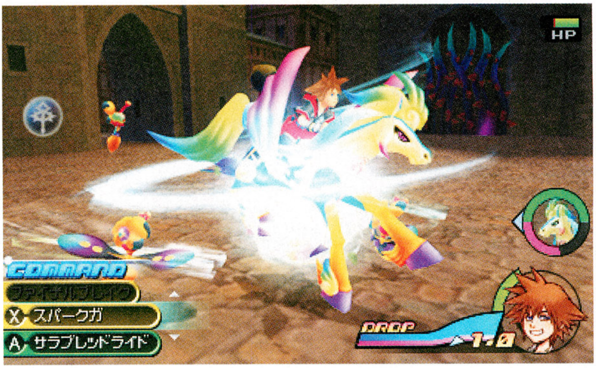
New worlds. New story. New gameplay. **Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance** opens a new chapter in the beloved saga.

Let's face it: the Kingdom Hearts series spent the past few years in a bit of a holding pattern. Recent chapters have mostly retread familiar territory, plugging gaps in the existing narrative or offering new perspectives on previous events. Those games have maintained a pretty high level of quality, but the saga hasn't taken a significant step forward since Kingdom Hearts 2 arrived in 2006. That finally changes later this year with the release of Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance. This Nintendo 3DS exclusive serves as a launching point for the franchise's future, proffering a twist-filled plot and a host of bold gameplay mechanics.



SCREENSHOTS FROM JAPANESE VERSION OF THE GAME

GOING THE DISTANCE



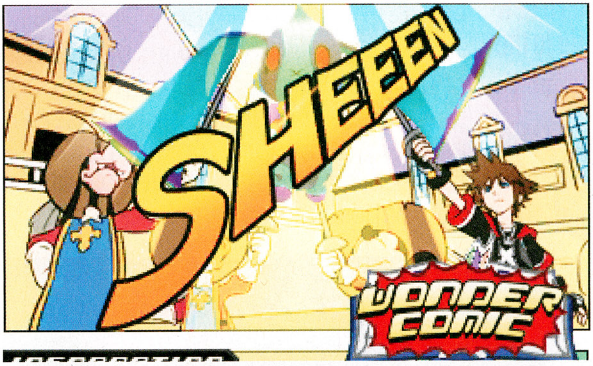
Set after the events of all prior games in the series, Dream Drop Distance sees the return of both Sora and Riku as playable characters. A new, as-yet-unrevealed threat looms on the horizon, and whatever it is seems to have King Mickey and the sorcerer Yen Sid pretty spooked. To ensure that our heroes are adequately prepared for the impending conflict, Yen Sid tasks Sora and Riku with completing the Mark of Mastery exam and thus becoming Keyblade Masters.

Previously, Kingdom Hearts titles took place in Disney-themed worlds that were plunged into darkness and overrun with malicious creatures known as the Heartless. As we learn in Dream Drop Distance, there also exist worlds that have been trapped in a mysterious slumber. The Mark of Mastery exam requires Sora and Riku to liberate those Sleeping Worlds and combat unfamiliar foes dubbed Dream Eaters.

Most of the destinations are completely new to the series, including worlds based on *Fantasia*, *Tron: Legacy*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The game begins, however, on the familiar streets of Traverse Town. Many longtime fans will no doubt bemoan the thought of returning to that quiet burg for what seems like the 400th.time. Fortunately, this particular sojourn is made more interesting by the presence of some unexpected visitors: the cast of Nintendo DS gem The World Ends with You. (Anyone who hasn't experienced that brilliantly creative title should do so as soon as possible. You'll thank us later.) When Sora arrives in Traverse Town, he runs into TWEWY's perpetually irritable protagonist Neku, and the interplay between their polar-opposite personalities proves instantly amusing. Sora cheerfully offers to be Neku's friend no more than 20 seconds after meeting him, causing the latter to respond tersely, "You're weird." The two nonetheless decide to stick together for the time being.

That's how the game opens if you start with Sora, anyway. You also have the option to kick things off with Riku, and in that case you'll be greeted by the enigmatic Joshua (also from TWEWY) in Traverse Town. Each hero's quest unfolds in its own way, but just because you choose one doesn't mean you'll miss out on the other. Instead you'll switch back and forth between the two via the Drop Gauge. This meter decreases with the passage of time and due to other factors like the presence of sleeping gas or certain enemy attacks. Though you can slow the meter's pace via special items and other strategic means, once it's empty you'll *immediately* switch to the other character, even if you're in the midst of battle. Then after the Drop Gauge runs out with that character, you'll pick up right where you left off with the previous one. It's an unconventional way for the game to present two stories in parallel and keep the player invested in both.

You can also press the Drop button on the touch



[Above] Each world has unique Reality Shift moves that you execute via the touch screen.

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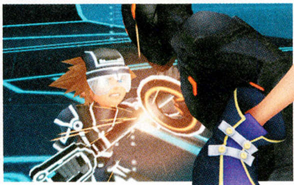
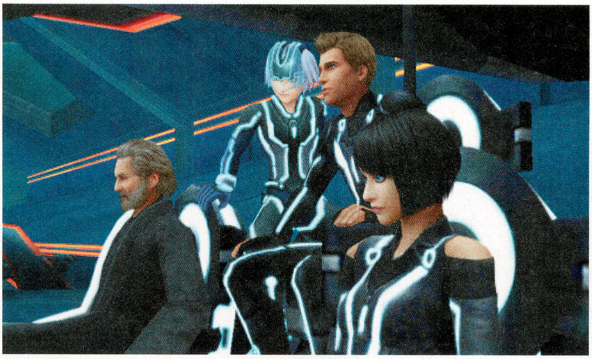
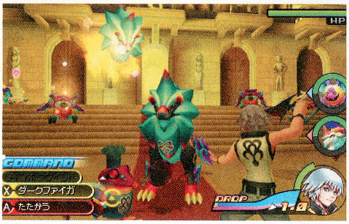
あなたが 女神様？







screen to deliberately make a switch at any time. That adds a strategic component, because prior to each switch, you'll receive Drop Points based on how many enemies you defeated on the current character's turn. You can spend the points to temporarily boost attack power, increase health, etc., but only for the character you're about to switch to. (Alternatively, you can convert some or all of your Drop Points into munnies, the game's currency.) This unorthodox system is a bit difficult to wrap your head around at first, but used effectively, it helps you adapt to whatever challenges a character is facing. If Riku is working his way through an area with lots of spell-users, for instance, you may want to crank up his magic defense next time you switch to him.

SLUMBER PARTY

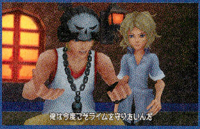
Traverse Town also offers ample opportunity to get acquainted with the game's new Flowmotion concept. This allows Sora or Riku to bounce off walls, swing from poles, grind rails, and perform all sorts of other context-sensitive maneuvers with a simple press of the Y Button. Skilled players can even string the actions together, moving swiftly through the environment in an impressive display of acrobatics. The mechanic comes into play during battle, as well (more on that momentarily), and makes the game feel faster and more frenetic than previous Kingdom Hearts. Additionally, it's a nice way of reflecting through gameplay that Sora and Riku are supposed to be more powerful than ever. During our demo, objects weren't always as "sticky" as we'd like (for instance, Sora would sometimes roll past a pole rather than swing from it), but the developers still have time to dial that in.

Of course, the Dream Eaters aren't about to sit back and let you traipse through their worlds unabated. On the contrary, the multicolored foes seem to spring up around every corner. Both Sora and Riku retain a Keyblade as their weapon of choice, and combat basics remain largely unchanged from previous games in the series. You jump, dodge, and attack in real time, and cycle

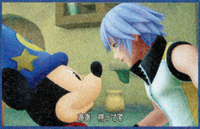
WONDERFUL WORLDS

Like previous Kingdom Hearts titles, Dream Drop Distance takes place in a number of worlds inspired by Disney films, as well as a handful of original locations created especially for the series. Here's the itinerary announced for the game thus far. Expect the final line-up to include at least two additional worlds. (We're keeping our fingers crossed for some Pixar love.)

TRAVERSE TOWN



FANTASIA



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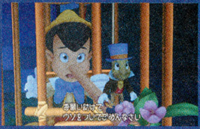

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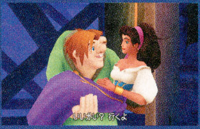
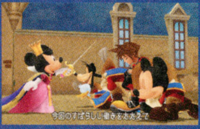
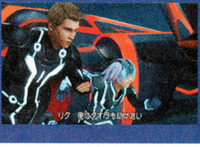
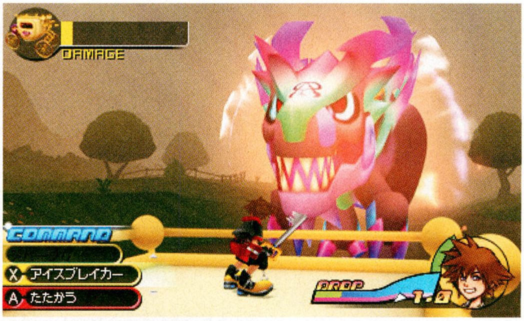


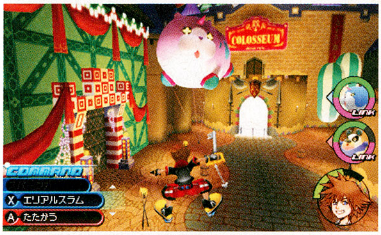
THE THREE MUSKETEERS



TRON: LEGACY







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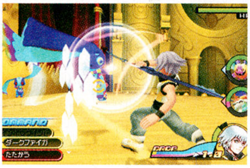


through your repertoire of spells, items, and special moves on the fly via the Control Pad. Beyond the core mechanics, however, our heroes have some new tricks up their sleeves. (Even if Riku doesn't technically have sleeves.) For starters, they can use Flowmotions to launch themselves into myriad flashy offensive maneuvers, whether it's springing off a wall for a downward thrust or swinging from a pole and kicking a Dream Eater in the face. Certain enemies even serve as platforms for Flowmotions. In one such example, your hero launches into a particularly hefty foe, hooks him with the Keyblade, then uses the momentum to fling the bad guy into his companions.

Another big difference from previous titles is that you're no longer joined in battle by Disney personalities like Donald and Goofy. Instead you fight alongside friendly Dream Eaters dubbed Spirits. (The nasty ones are called Nightmares.) These AI-controlled partners come in a variety of forms—from an overgrown cat to something that resembles a triceratops—each with particular strengths and abilities. You'll create Spirits using blueprints and materials acquired during your travels, and you can have two in your active party at any one time. (A third Spirit may be placed in reserve and swapped in and out during skirmishes via a swipe of the touch screen.)

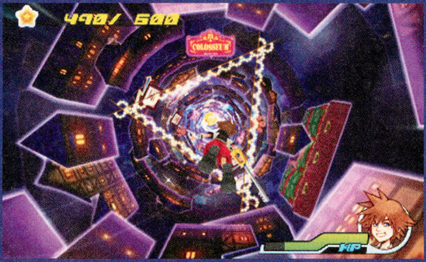
To get the most out of your companions, it's important to spend quality time with them away from the battlefield. Through the AR capabilities of the Nintendo 3DS handheld, you can pet a Spirit to improve its compatibility rating with your hero, for instance, or give it a toy to trigger various training minigames. Different Spirits have different personalities and will develop unique characteristics based on how you raise them. Bottom line: it's a good idea to show your phantasmal pet triceratops a little TLC once in a while.

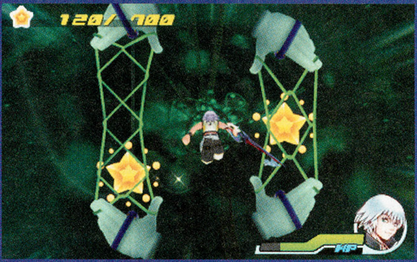
Spirits grow more formidable by participating in battle, as well. Each has a personal Ability Link grid, which is somewhat reminiscent of the Sphere Grid from Final Fantasy X. As a Spirit garners combat experience, it earns points that you can spend to unlock assorted upgrades via the grid. These upgrades range from parameter boosts for your ally to magic spells like Cure and Slow that the Spirit will start to mix in with its regular attacks.

The coup de grâce when it comes to Spirits, though, is their ultrapowerful Link Attacks. These flashy moves can be performed in tandem with your heroes once a Spirit fills its Link Gauge by successfully striking foes, casting spells, etc. Each Spirit type's Link Attack is unique, and the form it takes differs drastically between Sora and Riku. Sora typically hitches a ride on his companion. He'll bounce around on that aforementioned cat, for example, or bludgeon foes with an elephant Spirit's trunk. Riku, on the other hand, temporarily absorbs his ally's power and imbues himself with its

INTO DREAMS

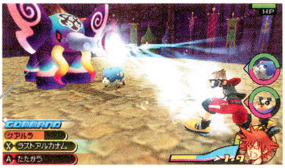
To enter one of the game's Sleeping Worlds, Sora or Riku must first pass through the dreamlike Dive Mode. As our heroes freefall toward their destination, it's your job to help them avoid perils and clear specified objectives—from battling foes to collecting a certain number of items. A whole new control scheme accompanies this mode, and you can earn moves specific to it during each dive. Dive Mode also seems to lend itself extremely well to the handheld's stereoscopic 3D, and if nothing else, it looks like a far more entertaining way of traveling between worlds than the ol' Gummi Ship.





abilities—from projectile attacks to limited flight. If you wait for both of your active Spirits to build up their Link Gauges, things get even crazier courtesy of Dual Link Attacks. One example during our demo: the cat actually sucks the elephant into its gaping maw, ballooning itself exponentially before stampeding everything in its path.

Spirits may not hold the novel allure of fighting side-by-side with Donald and Goofy, but they seem to lend Dream Drop Distance new strategic depth and a Pokémon-like addictive quality. They also drive the game's multiplayer component; you can pit your Spirits against a friend's in local wireless clashes.



ALL FOR ONE

Of course, Kingdom Hearts wouldn't be Kingdom Hearts without a generous supply of Disney magic and Dream Drop Distance is no exception. The majority of our demo took place in a world inspired by Disney's animated version of *The Three Musketeers*. Like the film, the game world features Mickey, Donald, and Goofy as the swashbuckling trio. When Sora arrives, though, he finds that his old pals don't recognize him. It turns out these manifestations of the characters have been trapped in this Sleeping World, so they're not the same as those who accompanied Sora on his previous adventures. (Yes, it's all a bit confusing; another hallmark of the series.) Nevertheless, they all become fast friends once more, and Sora happily offers to join the Musketeers.

Riku, meanwhile, uncovers a plot by the nefarious Pete to kidnap Princess Minnie and bring the Musketeers to an untimely end. What followed during our demo was an hour or so of impressively diverse gameplay. At one point Sora stands atop Minnie's speeding stagecoach, fighting off a huge T. rex as it gives chase. Later, Riku is tasked with searching every nook and cranny of a sprawling castle for the Beagle Boys, who prove surprisingly adept at hiding. We also dodged barrels while running up a staircase, disarmed a booby trap set by Pete, and took down one of the game's impressive bosses—a teleporting behemoth that could independently phase its hands through the walls and floors.

What we saw offered plenty of classic cartoon hijinks, as well. Our favorite moment involved Goofy jumping out a window as part of an ill-conceived yet fortuitously effective escape plan. The animation during all of the cut-scenes is fantastic, and every line of dialogue is fully voiced—by the official Disney actors in the case of Mickey and friends. In fact, the production values as a whole are sky-high. This is one of the best-looking and -sounding games we've experienced on Nintendo 3DS. It also boasts some of the system's finest stereoscopic 3D and supports the Circle Pad Pro for improved camera controls.

Our time with Dream Drop Distance felt like it barely scratched the surface. Screens and trailers hint at a game packed with content and filled with unexpected turns. We've caught glimpses of Roxas, Axel, and Vanitas, as well as a host of other characters who, by our reckoning, shouldn't still be around. Unfortunately, the biggest mystery remains the game's US release date; Square Enix has yet to announce anything more specific than 2012. Whenever it arrives, this looks to be one installment Kingdom Hearts fans can't afford to miss.

Kingdom Builder

Director. Writer. Character designer. Tetsuya Nomura wears many hats. Fortunately for us, the Kingdom Hearts mastermind was kind enough to put on his interviewee hat for an in-depth discussion of Dream Drop Distance and where the series goes from here.

NINTENDO POWER Kingdom Hearts 3D was first announced at the same time as the Nintendo 3DS hardware. What made you so eager to bring the series to this new platform?

TETSUYA NOMURA We were impressed with the passion that Nintendo put into the design of the N3DS hardware. And personally, I was excited by the idea of a Kingdom Hearts game that could be played in 3D in the palm of one's hands. That was certainly a big part of it.

Can you explain what the title—Dream Drop Distance—means?

The story for this installment takes place in a world submerged in sleep, and from that "sleep" we derived "Dream." "Drop," from the phrase "drop off to sleep," is our name for the system in which players alternate between control of Sora and Riku during gameplay. And since Sora and Riku are progressing through the game on different storylines, we chose "Distance" to express the gulf between them. And of course, since all three words start with the letter *D*, it could be shortened to 3D to add the meaning of three-dimensionality.

What can you tell us about the overarching story of the game and how it ties into the future of Kingdom Hearts?

The story in this installment picks up where Kingdom Hearts Re:Coded on the Nintendo DS left off, making it the most recent chapter of the timeline. It's the story that takes place right before the final chapter of the "Xehanort arc," which began with the very first Kingdom Hearts.

To give a brief summary of the game's premise, Yen Sid assigns Sora and Riku with visiting the Sleeping Worlds and opening the seven Sleeping Doors as their Mark of Mastery exam, which they must complete to become Keyblade Masters. However, a mysterious boy in a black cloak appears everywhere they go, and nothing ends up going exactly as planned. That's the gist of it.

In terms of the future of Kingdom Hearts, I know that fans are eager for the arc's final battle, and I hope to begin writing it soon.

In a previous interview, you mentioned that the Mark of Mastery exam won't span the entirety of the game. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

As I just mentioned, the mysterious boy in the black cloak causes the story to take an unexpected turn. Whenever he appears, Xehanort and other characters that have been linked to him, like Ansem, seem to follow, even though they've already been defeated in the past. Their story isn't about the Mark of Mastery exam, so that plotline proceeds in a different direction.

How did you decide which new Disney worlds to include in the game?

Tai Yasue, the game's codirector, suggested that since the film *Fantasia* contained many worlds, we could use that in the game to separate the worlds that Sora and Riku travel though. I've always wanted to visit *Fantasia* in a Kingdom Hearts game, so I jumped at the chance. It's a similar story with the other worlds. We considered how their worldview and settings could be used to interesting effect with the particular mechanics and scenario we had written for this installment, and selected them on that basis.

Why did you choose to make both Sora and Riku playable characters this time around?

Sora and Riku represent the theme of the Kingdom Hearts series, which is "the light and dark sides of the heart." This story takes place right before the final battle, and so we wanted to go back to the origin of the series and depict the polarity of light and darkness through their respective stories.

As big fans of The World Ends with You, we're excited to see its characters appear in Dream Drop Distance. What role do they play in this game?

In previous games in the Kingdom Hearts series, Final Fantasy characters made appearances and gave Sora guidance to help with his adventure. This time, it's characters from The World Ends with You who perform that role. The basic story is that the characters wandered into this world while playing the Reapers' Game, and became

ん？ 君は誰だい？
子供がここに入っちゃいけない！

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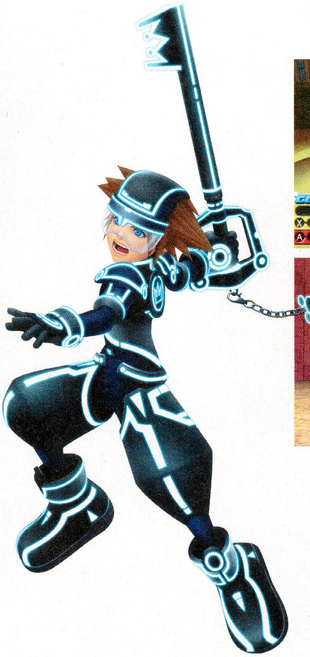
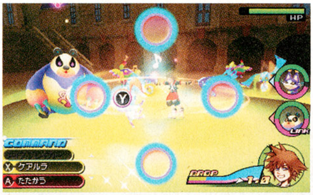




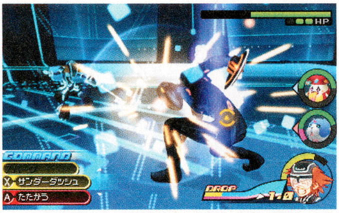
フロロー判事 大変です!

separated from their partners. Their stories begin with the teammates searching for each other.

Aside from yourself, did anyone on the Kingdom Hearts 3D team work on The World Ends with You?
The illustrator who worked on TWEWY, Gen Kobayashi, is now serving as the art director for Dream Drop Distance. That game's composer, Takeharu Ishimoto, has also created some of the music for DDD. Finally, the director of TWEWY, Tatsuya Kando, is working as this game's animation supervisor.

What are the origins of the Dream Eaters? And can you explain the difference between the two types: Spirits and Nightmares?
Actually, as you may have seen in the debut trailer, I was originally planning to go with Heartless and Nobodies. But when I started thinking about setting the game in a dream world with enemies who could grow and fight alongside the player, I felt that that it wouldn't really make sense to be raising Heartless and Nobodies. So I came up with the Dream Eaters as a new kind of enemy that appears in the Sleeping Worlds and that feeds on dreams instead of being focused on hearts the way Heartless and Nobodies are.

Nightmares are Dream Eaters who eat the dreams born in these worlds and sow nightmares instead; they appear as the main enemy for this installment. Spirits are good monsters who eat nightmares, and they fight alongside Sora and Riku as allies.



たったいま これをもって
君たちは銃士隊の一員だ

Will Sora and Riku fight alongside Disney characters at any point? Or do they strictly fight alongside their Spirit allies?
In this installment, they will be fighting almost exclusively alongside their Spirit allies. To be clear, this game isn't a spinoff, since it's a continuation of the series's main story. But when I'm working on a game in the series that isn't a numbered title, I like taking the opportunity to incorporate ambitious new systems like this.

The action in Dream Drop Distance is a lot faster and more frenetic than in previous Kingdom Hearts games. What was the motivation behind that?
I have a clear direction for how I want to see the Kingdom Hearts series evolve, and this change is part of moving in that direction. The games in the series are known as RPGs with a high level of action, in which anyone can perform flashy moves. In order to make that gameplay even more dynamic, we've implemented a new system called Flowmotion. With that, I think we've taken another step toward our ultimate goal for the series.

In a recent trailer, we spotted various Nobodies like Xemnas, Xion, and Axel. How is it that they're around for the events of this game?
I can't discuss the details just yet, but the mysterious boy in the black cloak has something to do with this. They will confuse Sora and Riku wherever they go.

Who would you say is the main villain in Dream Drop Distance?
I can't make a definitive statement because that could mean giving away a secret, but I will tell you that once again, the mysterious boy in the black cloak is the key to the answer.

Will the game take advantage of StreetPass or SpotPass?
The game does take advantage of StreetPass capabilities, and uses them in its Spirit-breeding system.

Who's composing the soundtrack for the game? Will it include a new theme song?
With this installment, Yoko Shimomura will continue her role as the series's main composer. Takeharu Ishimoto and Tsuyoshi Sekito—who have worked on previous installments like Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep—will also be contributing music to the game. Ishimoto will be handling songs not only from The World Ends with You, but from other game worlds as well. As with our previous titles, the theme music is going to be a song by Hikaru Utada.

Will all of the US voice actors from previous Kingdom Hearts titles be reprising their roles in Dream Drop Distance?
That's certainly the plan. In fact, the voice recording for the North American version is already underway.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the series. Do you have anything else special in store for 2012 to celebrate the occasion?
In Japan, we're planning to release a 10-year commemorative box set. We don't have any other solid plans, but the series has had a lot of support from fans in North America, so I hope we can do something special for them as well.

Finally, if we ask nicely, would you share something about Dream Drop Distance that you haven't mentioned anywhere else?
This is the first time we're doing this, but there's a surprise during the ending credits. So even when the credits start to roll, don't put down your N3DS, and don't let your guard down!

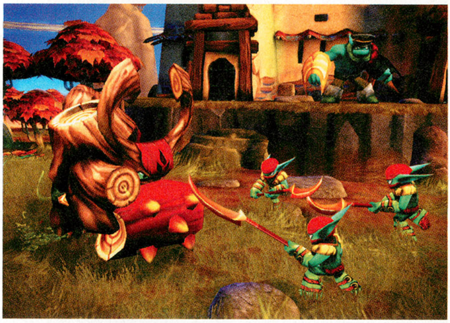
LARGER THAN LIFE

With a new game and toys on the horizon, **Skylanders: Giants** looks to be the Wii console's next big thing.

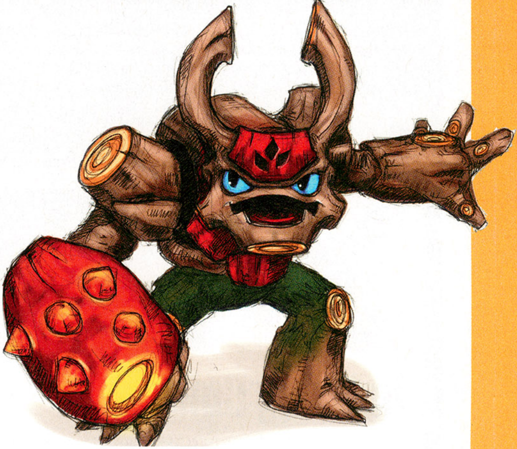
BY **PHIL THEOBALD**

PUBLISHER: **ACTIVSION** DEVELOPER: **TOYS FOR BOB** RELEASE: **FALL 2012** Wii

When Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure was released for Wii and Nintendo 3DS last October, it took the gaming world by storm and became the top kids' title for 2011. That performance was surely due in part to its unique concept; it's an action game that interacts with a line of toys by means of the Portal of Power, a device that wirelessly connects with your game system. Placing a figure on top of the portal causes the character to come to life within the game world, where you can then use it to take on the bad guys. As you upgrade your characters' stats, the information is saved in the toy, allowing you to take your figure to a friend's house and continue playing with your custom creation. With more than 30 different toys to collect, it's no wonder that fans became a little obsessive.



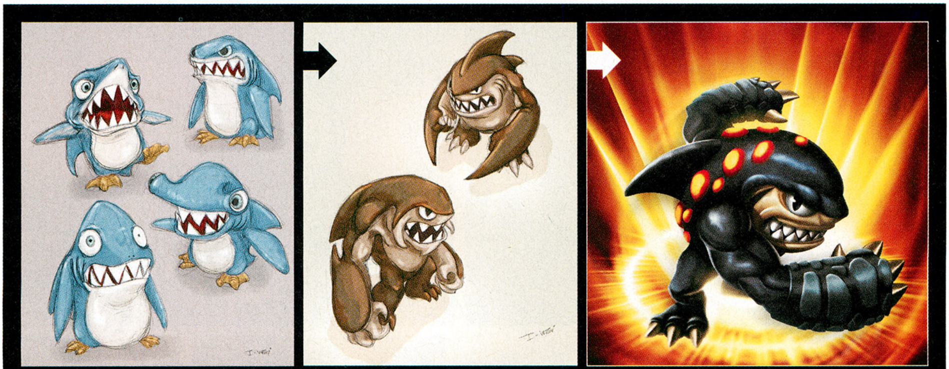
[Above] A fellow of Tree Rex's size can strong-arm his way through enemies.



Luckily, those fans won't have to wait long to get another Skylanders fix, as a sequel is already in production. The developers at Toys for Bob were nice enough to give us a sneak peek at what we can expect when it's released this fall. Skylanders: Giants picks up where its predecessor left off. Following his defeat, the evil Portal Master Kaos has been banished from the Skylands and is now trapped on Earth. The villain, of course, is attempting to return, but he isn't the only threat to the Skylanders. A mysterious ancient species has somehow been revived after a 10,000-year slumber and is wreaking havoc. In response, the legendary Portal Master Eon tasks you with reviving the Giants, a race of creatures that locked away this new menace millennia ago.

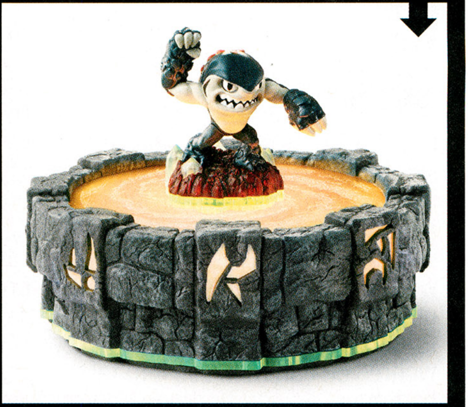
Therein lies this new game's main draw—the ability to play as the long-dormant Giants. According to Paul Yan, the game's lead animator, the idea of introducing Giants to the Skylanders universe originated during animation tests for the first game. Not content to simply have a cast of larger characters, though, the development team wanted to make playing as a Giant noticeably different from controlling the normal-sized Skylanders. The demo that we were shown had the player in control of a wooden beast tentatively dubbed Tree Rex. Imagine one of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ents after it had been hitting the gym for a few months.

Aside from simply being larger, the Giants have a host of new

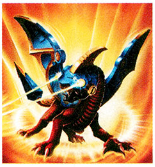


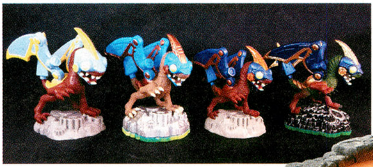
Evolution of a Skylander

Skylanders don't simply spring into existence. A surprising amount of planning and effort goes into creating each character that appears in the game. I-Wei Huang, the toy and character director at Toys for Bob, walked us through the process. It all begins with an idea for a potential character. Then dozens of rough sketches are drawn to show how the character might look. Tweaks and refinements are made until the creators have a design that makes sense as both a video game character and a toy. From there the character is rendered in 3D to be animated in the game. Meanwhile, artists create a model of the character to be used as a basis for the toy. During development of the original Skylanders, these models were typically made of clay and hand-painted. Now the models are rendered on computers and given physical form via a 3D printer. The artists can experiment with various poses until they find one that perfectly captures the character's essence, at which point the figure is sent off to be mass-produced.



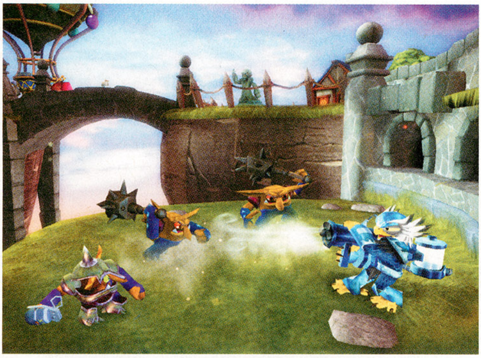
[Above] Terrafin began his life as an oddly-adorable shark/penguin hybrid. As his design evolved, he began to look much tougher and more ferocious.

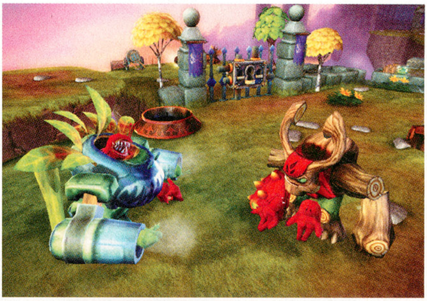




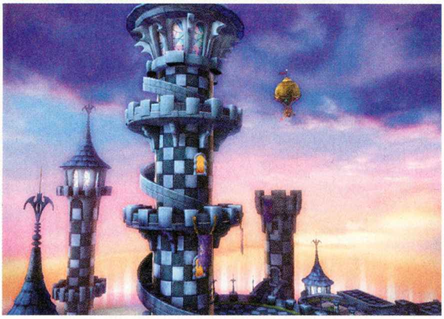
In Living Color

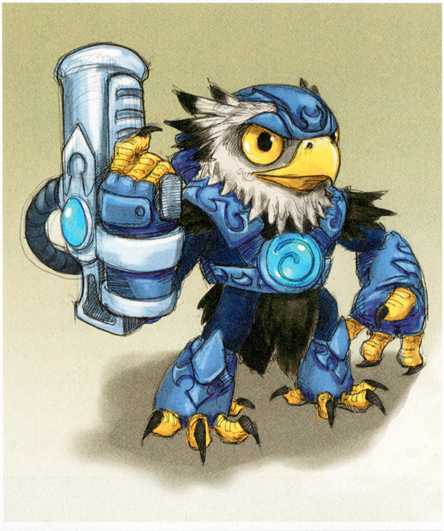
Although the Skylanders' final character design is chosen before the toy is completed, it can sometimes be a challenge making sure that the final figure looks as good as the 2D representations. As you can see on Drobot here, the toys go through a few paint designs before a perfect version is agreed upon. The right paint job can be the difference between having a toy that looks like a cheap fast food giveaway and one that looks awesome displayed on a shelf.





[Above] Not all the fights are going to be easy. In addition to smaller thugs, the Giants will also have to pick on opponents their own size.





[Above] The Giants don't just rely on brute force to get past their foes. This massive bird uses his tech as much as he does his razor-sharp talons.

abilities. Not surprisingly, they are significantly stronger than their diminutive counterparts. We saw Tree Rex crush small obstacles, smash through walls and cracked floors, and pick up boulders to use as weapons. Perhaps the Giants' most impressive techniques are what's known as a Feats of Strength. These moves vary based on the context, but in the one we saw, Tree Rex grabbed a massive chain and used it to drag a floating island toward the land mass upon which he was standing. This created a whole new area to explore.

It's not just special powers that help sell the concept of controlling a Giant. Both the enemies and the environment react differently when you switch out a "normal" Skylander for one of the behemoths. The game's bad guys are intelligent enough to know when they're outmatched, so you'll often see them flee when a Giant enters the fray. Instead of launching a full-on assault, the enemy will hide behind barriers and attempt to attack the Giant from a distance. In a slightly more subtle touch, you'll notice that some objects in each stage (barrels, crates, and the like) will start to bounce from the Giants' plodding footsteps.

Of course, new Giant characters mean new Giant toys to interact with the Portal of Power. The prototype figure of Tree Rex that we were shown is roughly twice as tall as the current Skylanders figures. The toys from the Giants line also have a new light-up feature. When Tree Rex was placed on the portal, for example, his eyes began to glow and one of his fists shone to represent the beam that he can shoot from his hands. Expect some of the returning Skylanders characters to be updated with new figures that have shining parts of their own.

Like with the original Skylanders, two toys can stand on the portal for multiplayer action. The Giants might be a tight fit on the device, but you can indeed have two Giants tearing up the stage simultaneously. Those of you with a massive collection of figures from the first Skylanders title needn't worry about obsolesce—all of your old characters are compatible with Skylanders: Giants and their stats will carry over to this new title.

As this game takes place in the same world as its predecessor, it should come as no surprise that things look much like they did before. There are new areas to explore, certainly, but the design aesthetic remains a blend of realism and hand-painted cartoon whimsy. The soundtrack is getting some enhancements for this sequel, however. Dan Neil, Skylanders: Giants's audio director, tells us that the game's music will be far more dynamic this time around, changing to fit the mood of the area in which you find yourself. One level even features a unique soundtrack comprising various sound effects. Traveling through this industrial area will generate a score made up of blasts from steam vents, conveyer belts, fire bursts, clanging pipes, and more.

Whether you're most excited about the game or the new line of toys, there's a lot to look forward to in Skylanders: Giants. Just be sure to clear some room on the display shelf where you have your current collection of Skylanders toys. These bulky new characters are going to take up a lot of space.

THE 2011 NINTENDO POWER AWARDS

Honoring the year's best on Wii, Nintendo 3DS, and Nintendo DS.

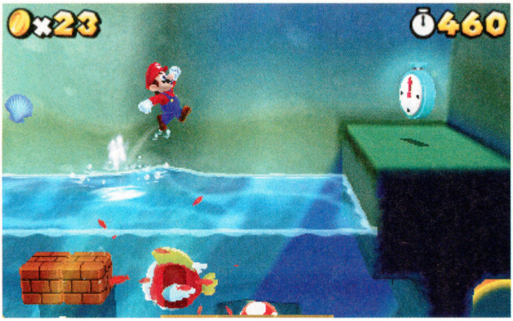
From big-name sequels like Super Mario 3D Land and The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword to innovative original titles such as Radiant Historia and Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective, 2011 was packed with amazing games on Nintendo systems. But which were the best? On the following pages, you'll see the games that we (and you!) picked as the greatest standouts from last year in the 24th annual Nintendo Power Awards.

GAME OF THE YEAR Wii

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Admittedly, picking The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword for Wii Game of the Year is a bit predictable, but there's no denying that the latest installment of the beloved series is truly legendary. The game looks and sounds fantastic, and new twists on the established formula make this the freshest console Zelda game in years. Lovable characters, an excellent narrative, awesome boss battles, well-designed dungeons—this one pretty much has it all. Not only is it the best Wii game of 2011, but it's one of the best Wii games ever.

ALSO NOMINATED: Bit.Trip Complete; Kirby's Return to Dream Land; Rayman Origins; Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters



GAME OF THE YEAR NINTENDO 3DS

Super Mario 3D Land

New Mario games always make us sit up and take notice, but when it's a platformer that draws its inspiration from one of the best Mario titles of all time (that's Super Mario Bros. 3, of course), we *really* pay attention. With its spot-on control, outstanding level design, and steadily building challenge, Super Mario 3D Land proves that portable Mario games can compete with their console brethren.

ALSO NOMINATED: Dead or Alive Dimensions; The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D; Mario Kart 7; Sonic Generations; Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition

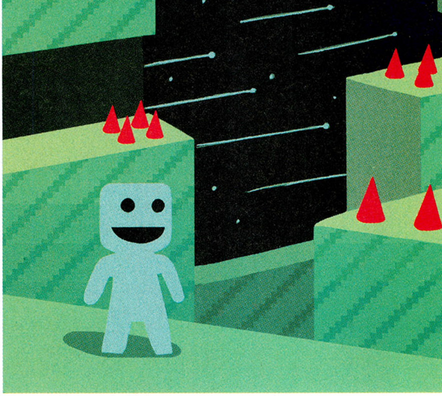
NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

GAME OF THE YEAR NINTENDO DS

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective

When we reviewed Capcom's Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective in Vol. 263, we declared that it was "sure to be one of the best DS games of 2011." That statement couldn't have been more accurate. Ghost Trick rose above its competition thanks to a unique gameplay hook—the ability to possess and manipulate various objects—and superb storytelling. We'd expect no less from a game concocted by Ace Attorney creator Shu Takumi.

ALSO NOMINATED: Kirby Mass Attack; Okamiden; Pokémon Black and Pokémon White Versions; Professor Layton and the Last Specter; Solatorobo: Red the Hunter

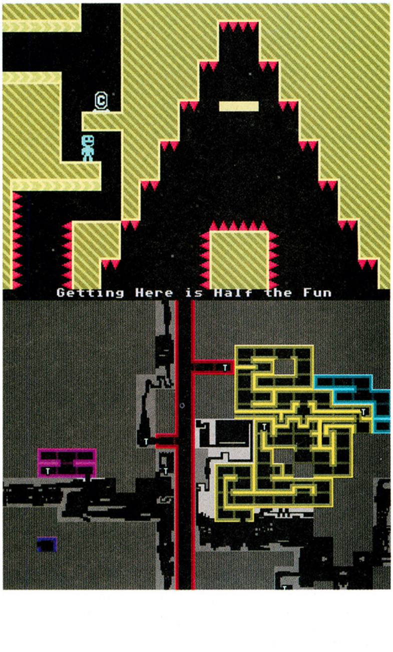


GAME OF THE YEAR DOWNLOADABLE

VVVVVV (eShop)

Looking at VVVVVV's simple graphics, one might be fooled into thinking that the game is equally simple. It's not. This tribute to the days of the Commodore 64 requires precision movement and demands nothing less than perfection. Mastering the gravity-reversing gameplay is supremely satisfying, and the excellent soundtrack enhances the experience.

ALSO NOMINATED: Antipole (DSiWare); Bit.Trip Flux (WiiWare); The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition (DSiWare); Mighty Switch Force (eShop); MotoHeroz (WiiWare)

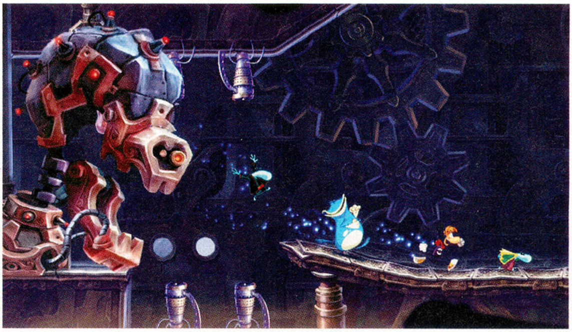


BEST GRAPHICS **Wii**

Rayman Origins

In the age of sky-high polygon counts and fancy texture effects, we're still suckers for some lovingly hand-drawn 2D art. Every second of Rayman Origins is a joy to behold. The screen constantly bristles with color and energy, making this one of the most visually appealing games *ever* seen on Wii. It makes us wish more developers had gone the hand-drawn route with Nintendo's console.

ALSO NOMINATED: Conduit 2; Kirby's Return to Dream Land; The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

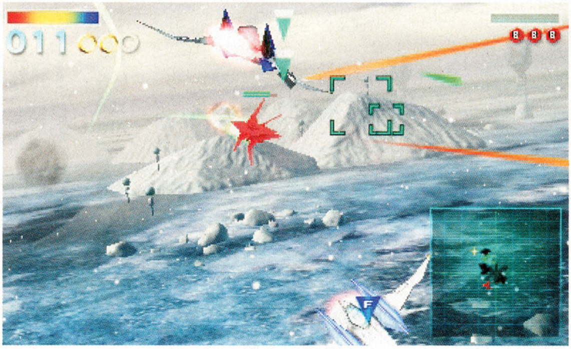


BEST GRAPHICS **NINTENDO 3DS**

Star Fox 64 3D

There are a lot of great-looking N3DS games, so it was tough to whittle down the nominees to just one standout. After taking everything into consideration, though, it's clear that Star Fox 64 3D is the most visually striking of them all due to its sharp textures and impressive environments (particularly those that include water, ice, or sand).

ALSO NOMINATED: Dead or Alive Dimensions; The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D; Nano Assault; Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D; Super Mario 3D Land

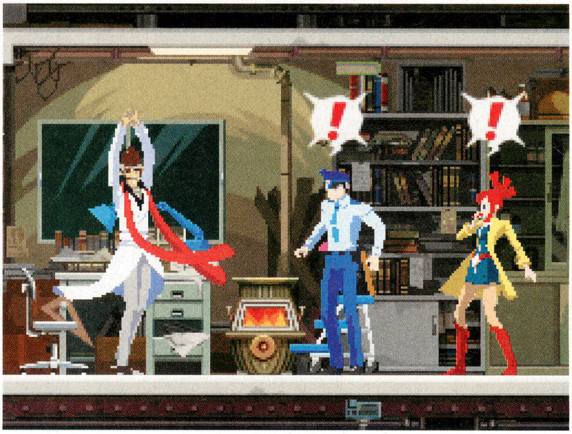


BEST GRAPHICS **NINTENDO DS**

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective

The nearly decade-old Nintendo DS is showing its age a bit, but Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective proves that graphically impressive titles can still be made for the dual-screened handheld. Not only does this game have a distinct comic-bookish visual style, but it also delivers jaw-droppingly fluid animations.

ALSO NOMINATED: Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation; Kingdom Hearts Re:coded; Monster Tale; Radiant Historia; Solatorobo: Red the Hunter



NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

BEST ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

Rayman Origins (Wii)

As incredible as the graphics are in Rayman Origins, the game's soundtrack may just be the star of the show. The compositions are some of the most creative you'll hear, employing everything from didgeridoos to gibberish vocal melodies. Fitting each stage like a glove, they masterfully amplify the unhinged atmosphere just as Carl Stalling's work did for classic *Looney Tunes* shorts.

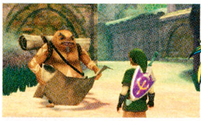
ALSO NOMINATED: Bit.Trip Complete (Wii); The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii); Radiant Historia (DS); Sonic Generations (N3DS); Super Mario 3D Land (N3DS)

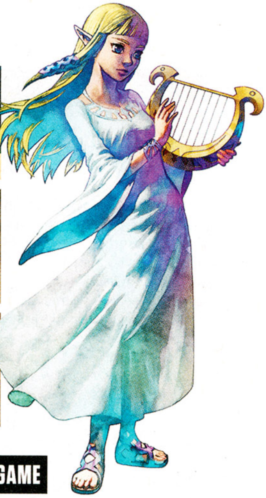
BEST ROLE-PLAYING/STRATEGY GAME

Radiant Historia (DS)

What's cooler than being able to travel through time and rewrite history? Not much. That ability (combined with the power to jump between two significantly different realities) is what makes Radiant Historia one of the most complex, ambitious, and story-rich RPGs we've seen in quite a while. A great soundtrack, an involving battle system, crisp hand-drawn visuals, and loads of optional side quests help make it even better.

ALSO NOMINATED: Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation (DS); Pokémon Black and Pokémon White Versions (DS); Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked (N3DS); Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars (N3DS)



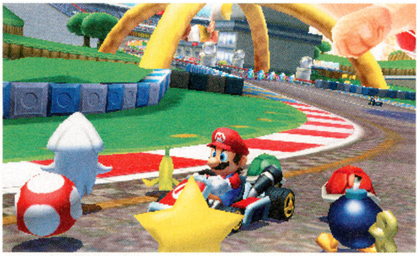


BEST ADVENTURE GAME

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)

The Legend of Zelda series is known for delivering epic fantasy adventures, and the latest chapter, The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword, is no different. The game provides a perfect mix of exploration, puzzles, and sword-swinging combat, and it does so in a way that's unlike anything Zelda fans have seen before. Not surprisingly, Skyward Sword's toughest competition came from the 3D-enhanced remake of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.

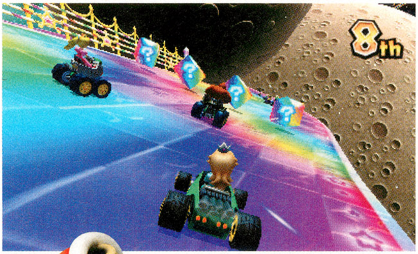
ALSO NOMINATED: Cave Story 3D (N3DS); Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective (DS); The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D (N3DS); Okamiden (DS); Solatorobo: Red the Hunter (DS)



BEST RACING GAME

Mario Kart 7 (N3DS)

When it comes to making an enjoyable racing game filled with outrageously varied tracks, the Mario Kart formula is tough to beat. It's not the most realistic racer on the market, what with its Koopa shells, bombs, raccoon tails, and all, but there's no denying that those outrageous items add to the fun.
ALSO NOMINATED: FAST Racing League (WiiWare); MotoHeroz (WiiWare); Ridge Racer 3D (N3DS)

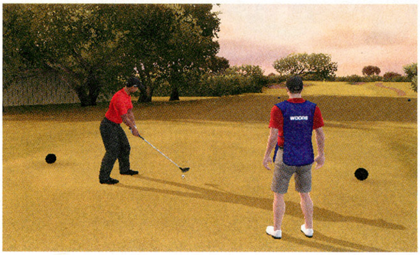


NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

BEST SPORTS GAME

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters (Wii)

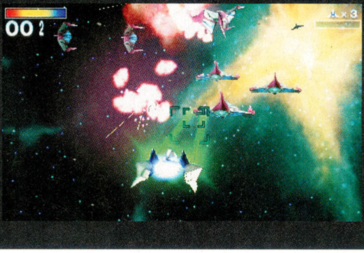
For our money, no other sports franchise has consistently delivered on Wii like Tiger Woods PGA Tour. EA has honed the core gameplay mechanics to such a level of authenticity that we're occasionally struck by the urge to hurl our controllers into the nearest lake. It looks like this will be the final Wii installment of the series, but hopefully the sport continues to advance on Wii U.
ALSO NOMINATED: FIFA Soccer 12 (Wii); Mario Sports Mix (Wii); Virtua Tennis 4 (Wii)



BEST SHOOTER/ACTION GAME

Star Fox 64 3D (N3DS)

Whether you're flying through space in an Arwing starfighter or blasting Andross's forces in a Landmaster tank, there's rarely a break from the excitement in Star Fox 64 3D. Even when we'd finished the game, the multiple alternate paths and secret areas had us picking up our systems for another go.
ALSO NOMINATED: Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy (N3DS); Aliens: Infestation (DS); Kirby Mass Attack (DS); Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D (N3DS); Shinobi (N3DS)



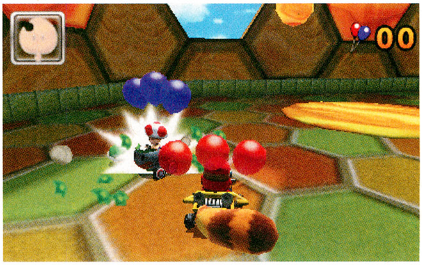
BEST FIGHTING GAME

Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition (N3DS)

The fighting genre has seen something of a rebirth on the N3DS, and the title we keep going back to is the one that launched at the same time as the system. Yes, the battlegrounds can feel a bit lifeless, but we're always too focused on Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition's excellent mano-a-mano combat to really care.

ALSO NOMINATED: BlazBlue: Continuum Shift II (N3DS); Dead or Alive Dimensions (N3DS); WWE All Stars (N3DS)

K.O.
48
Ryu
Michael
0 BP
Ken
George
0 BP



BEST MULTIPLAYER

Mario Kart 7 (N3DS)

Few games get our competitive blood boiling as much as Mario Kart 7. It's always satisfying listening to the simultaneous cries of victory and curses of defeat when the Spiny Shells start flying. MK7 ups the ante with a host of new multiplayer options that make playing online easier and more captivating than ever before.

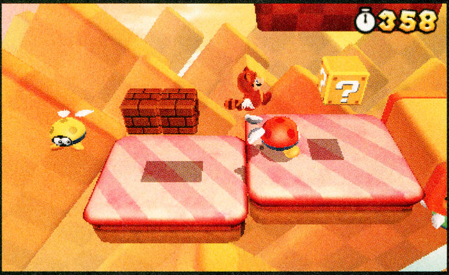
ALSO NOMINATED: Kirby's Return to Dream Land (Wii); The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition (DSiWare); MotoHeroz (WiiWare); Rayman Origins (Wii); Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D (N3DS)

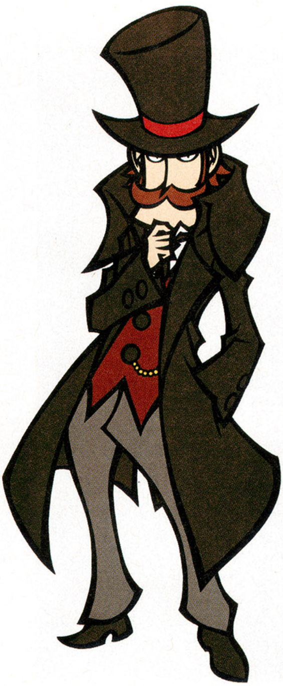
BEST PLATFORMER

Super Mario 3D Land (N3DS)

Mario is still the master when it comes to platforming. His latest outing, Super Mario 3D Land, is a case study in how to make a modern masterpiece. The game's tight controls combined with the well-designed levels filled with stuff to jump on make for a truly amazing experience.

ALSO NOMINATED: de Blob 2 (Wii); Giana Sisters DS (DS); Kirby's Return to Dream Land (Wii); Rayman Origins (Wii); Sonic Generations (N3DS)





BEST NEW CHARACTER

Dr. Lautrec—Dr. Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights (N3DS)

Mustachioed archaeologist Doctor Jean-Pierre Lautrec is an untraditional choice for best new character in that he's sort of a jerk. But he's a highly entertaining jerk. In fact, his acerbic tongue—this is not a man who suffers fools gladly—is easily the most redeeming quality of an otherwise-forgettable game. We'd love to see the good doctor return in a sequel more deserving of his unique charisma.
ALSO NOMINATED: Chibiterasu—Okamiden (DS); Ghirahim—The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii); Groose—The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii); Red the Hunter—Solatorobo: Red the Hunter (DS); Sissel—Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective (DS)

BEST STORY/WRITING

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective (DS)

Everybody loves a good mystery. That's what makes Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective so darn compelling: it piles mysteries on top of mysteries, leaving you on the edge of your seat trying to figure out just what's going on. Heck—you don't even know who the protagonist is, exactly, until the end of the game! Ghost Trick also boasts brilliant characterization and a stellar mix of humor and drama.
ALSO NOMINATED: Back to the Future: The Game (WiiWare); Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights (N3DS); The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii); Radiant Historia (DS); Solatorobo: Red the Hunter (DS)

Off we go, across the bridge of
poultry, to the land of love!

♪ La la la! Chiiiiicken!
Thou art so beautiful, Chiiiiicken!

BEST NEW IDEA

StreetPass Mii Plaza (N3DS)

There aren't many games that every NP writer feels compelled to play every single day, but the StreetPass Mii Plaza, built into the N3DS hardware, keeps us constantly coming back for more. Mingling with other players to earn puzzle pieces and unlock new hats has become nothing short of an addiction. Now if only we could find all of those dang-blasted pink puzzle pieces....
ALSO NOMINATED: Solving puzzles by possessing objects—Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective (DS); Playing as and interacting with shadows—Lost in Shadow (Wii); Augmented reality—AR Games (N3DS); Portal of Power—Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure (Wii)

Mii
Nestario

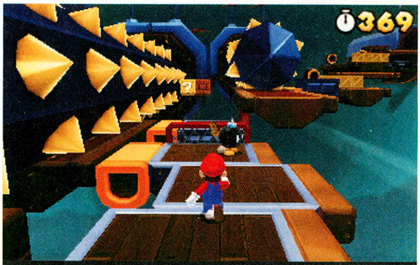
NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

BEST RETRO REVIVAL

Sonic Generations (N3DS)

Sonic Generations isn't the first attempt at bringing Sonic the Hedgehog back to his roots, but it's certainly the best. Seeing classic pot-bellied Sonic zoom across the screen warmed many a gamer's heart, and the combination of retro and modern in this title is a perfect way to celebrate the Blue Blur's 20th anniversary. Besides, the game refers to Sonic's antagonist by his original name of Dr. Robotnik, which is pretty darn endearing in our book.

ALSO NOMINATED: Giana Sisters DS (DS); The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition (DSiWare); The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D (N3DS); Shinobi (N3DS); Star Fox 64 3D (N3DS)



BEST STEREOSCOPIC 3D

Super Mario 3D Land

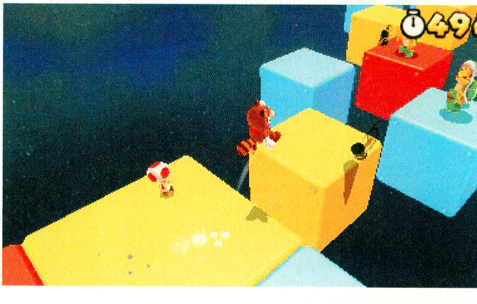
The Nintendo 3DS gives us a new way to look at the games we play. It's Super Mario 3D Land, however, that allows the system's 3D capabilities to really shine. Far from being just a cosmetic feature, the 3D here actually assists with the gameplay. From portraying perspective-bending bonus rooms to helping us fly in a Propeller Box, the 3D gives the game added (ahem) depth.

ALSO NOMINATED: Dead or Alive Dimensions; The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D; Mario Kart 7; Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D; Star Fox 64 3D

FINISH-STRONG AWARD

Super Mario 3D Land (N3DS)

If we have one minor quibble about the outstanding Super Mario 3D Land, it's that the game is a bit of a cakewalk for what initially seems like most of the adventure. But then you discover that your epic confrontation with Bowser marks the less-than-halfway point; you still have eight challenging yet fun Special Worlds as well as the überchallenging final level to complete.



BIGGEST WHAT-THE-HECK MOMENT

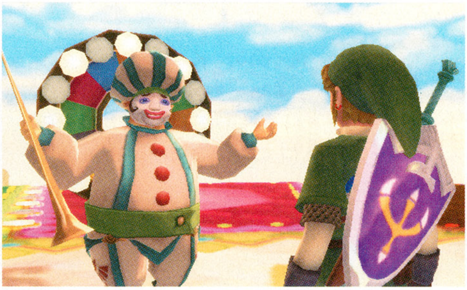
Space Lincoln and Space Washington—Conduit 2 (Wii)

Despite being a game that deals with aliens and government conspiracies, Conduit 2 doesn't hold many surprises—it is a fairly standard, mostly uninspired first-person shooter. But then we reached the finale, in which a conduit opens in front of protagonist Michael Ford, and former US Presidents Abraham Lincoln and George Washington emerge, clad in futuristic armor.

MOST INFURIATING

Fun Fun Island—The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)

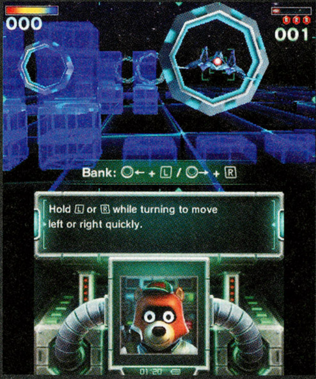
Perhaps the only thing more annoying than trying to dive through the rings, avoid the hazards, and land on the moving 50-Rupee spot on Fun Fun Island in The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword is having to put up with the mocking remarks from Dodoh, the island's sorry excuse for a proprietor. We would have given up our Piece of Heart for the chance to send that bloated beanbag hurtling through the wild blue yonder.



CREEP OF THE YEAR

The Trainer—Star Fox 64 3D (N3DS)

The green-hatted raccoon who acts as your trainer in Star Fox 64 didn't make much of an impression on us in his original N64 incarnation, but now that we've heard his deep voice in Star Fox 64 3D, we're officially creeped out. Kids, if you see this guy in a van giving out candy, *run*.

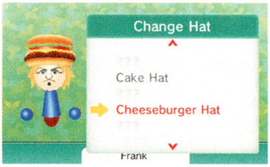


Hold L or R while turning to move left or right quickly.

BEST HAT (StreetPass Mii Plaza)

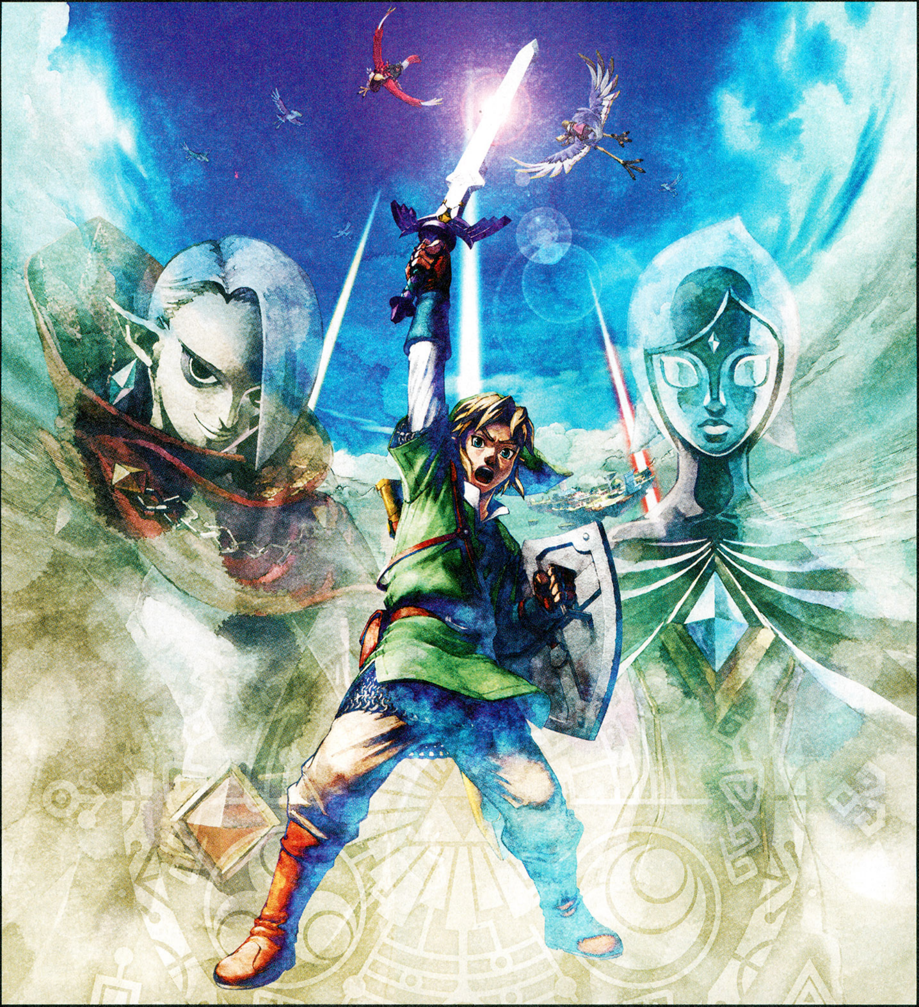
Cheeseburger Hat

This was, perhaps, the most hotly contested category in this year's Nintendo Power Awards. Though the retro-chic NES hat and the classy top hat were strong contenders, in the end they were dethroned by the cheeseburger hat—because nothing beats having a gigantic beef patty slapped on your noggin. Incidentally, we envision the real-life wearing of oversized foodstuffs becoming a major fashion trend in 2012.



NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

★ OVERALL GAME OF THE YEAR ★



The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)

As the 25th anniversary of the franchise's worldwide debut, 2011 was a banner year for the Legend of Zelda series. A 3D-enhanced version of the beloved Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time? Awesome! An updated Four Swords on DSiWare? Sign us up! But the crowning achievement was the long-awaited Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword for Wii. The first Zelda game built from the ground up for that console, Skyward Sword has it all, from a beautiful watercolor aesthetic to innovative motion controls to an original storyline that explores the origins of the Master Sword and Hyrule itself. A massive quest makes it easy to while away hours immersed in the game's forests, deserts, and dungeons, using swordplay and items to slay foes and solve puzzles—and we can't think of a more enjoyable way to spend our time.

READERS' CHOICE

You came, you saw, you voted. Here are the best games of 2011 as determined by you, the readers, via our online poll.

Wii GAME OF THE YEAR	The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword
NINTENDO 3DS GAME OF THE YEAR	Super Mario 3D Land
NINTENDO DS GAME OF THE YEAR	Pokémon Black and Pokémon White Versions
DOWNLOADABLE GAME OF THE YEAR	The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition (DSiWare)
BEST Wii GRAPHICS	The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword
BEST NINTENDO 3DS GRAPHICS	Super Mario 3D Land
BEST NINTENDO DS GRAPHICS	Kingdom Hearts Re:coded
BEST ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK	The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)
BEST ADVENTURE GAME	The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)
BEST ROLE-PLAYING/STRATEGY GAME	Pokémon Black and Pokémon White Versions (DS)
BEST SPORTS GAME	Mario Sports Mix (Wii)
BEST RACING GAME	Mario Kart 7 (N3DS)
BEST SHOOTER/ACTION GAME	Star Fox 64 3D (N3DS)
BEST FIGHTING GAME	Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition (N3DS)
BEST PLATFORMER	Super Mario 3D Land (N3DS)
BEST MULTIPLAYER	Mario Kart 7 (N3DS)
BEST NEW CHARACTER	Ghirahim–The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)
BEST STORY/WRITING	The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)
BEST NEW IDEA	Augmented Reality–AR Games (N3DS)
BEST RETRO REVIVAL	The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (N3DS)
BEST STEREOSCOPIC 3D	Super Mario 3D Land
OVERALL GAME OF THE YEAR	**The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)**

future sight

Xenoblade Chronicles—the long-awaited Wii epic about a clairvoyant sword—foretells a brighter tomorrow for Japanese RPGs.

BY **CASEY LOE**

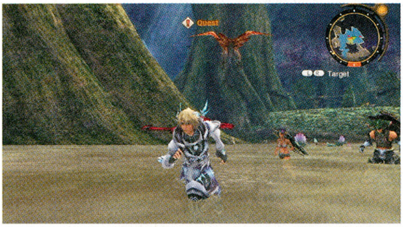
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **MONOLITH SOFT** RELEASE: **APRIL 2012** Wii

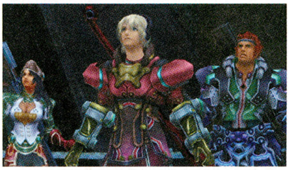
It has, by all accounts, been a terrible year for Japanese-made RPGs. Prominent franchises have been serving up high-profile turkeys and smaller franchises have disappeared entirely as their publishers weigh the genre's rising development costs against its diminishing overseas appeal. Meanwhile, Western RPG developers have been mastering the modern arts of free choice and open-world game design that so many Japanese publishers have ignored entirely, and stealing huge chunks of market share in the process. Japanese third-party publishers have been losing ground to their Western rivals for years, but in Japan's most popular genre? That's got to sting.

Tetsuya Takahashi, the president of Monolith Soft and writer and executive director of the company's Xenoblade Chronicles, can point to any number of reasons for Japan's failures (see the interview that accompanies this feature), but remains invested in the genre on which he has built his entire career. "The trend in Japanese RPG development has been to focus resources on graphics while skimping on game content. And before Xenoblade Chronicles," admits Takahashi, "we at Monolith Soft had been pursuing that exact same philosophy." Indeed, Takahashi's Xenosaga series was often criticized for focusing on lavish event scenes and elaborate storytelling at the expense of gameplay. "But after a great deal of experience with it," he tells us, "I began to wonder if we could better distinguish ourselves with the exact opposite strategy—devoting the minimum necessary amount of effort to graphics, and putting the rest of our resources toward expanding the scope of the game."

Mission accomplished. Xenoblade Chronicles is a huge game, delivering an honest-to-goodness 100 hours of content on a typical playthrough—and that's not even counting all the new areas that open up on a second pass. The game's environments are staggeringly vast, taking hours to explore thoroughly, and the game offers nearly 500 side quests to give players incentives to visit every corner of its world. It also piles on deep (but entirely optional) mechanics—for instance, there's an affinity system that doesn't just track how close your party characters have become but also how every one of the hundreds of named NPC townsfolk feel about each other, and rewards players for strengthening the bonds between them. To keep the lengthy quest interesting, Xenoblade Chronicles offers a large cast of playable characters, each with radically different fighting styles, who can be combined to create a variety of unique combat strategies.

Takahashi certainly delivered on his promise to focus on substance, and it doesn't hurt that the "minimum necessary amount of effort" devoted to graphics somehow paid big dividends. Sure, the textures don't always look great up close and the combat animation can be a bit stiff, but the game's ability to show the entirety of its massive environments leads to some stunning vistas in which you can see for what feels like miles and know that if anything catches your eye—the shimmer of a waterfall, a distant tower, an odd rock formation—there won't be any invisible walls or loading screens stopping you from hiking over to take a closer look.

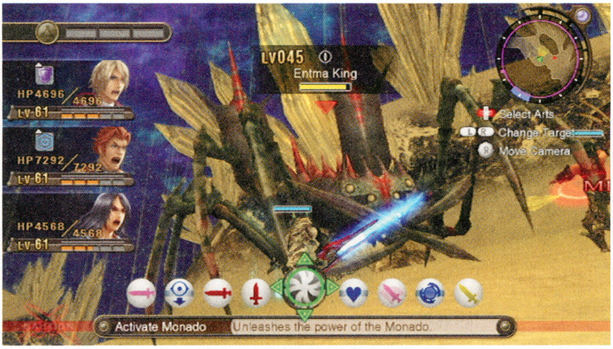




[Above] You can dress your heroes in anything from bikinis to tribal wear to heavy armor.

IN THE LAP OF THE GODS

Takahashi was riding the train to work when he was struck by a sudden flash of inspiration: Why not make a game about people living on the bodies of fallen gods? As soon as he arrived at the office, Takahashi set about sculpting a model of two titanic deities locked in mortal combat, asking junior employees to act out various poses so he could figure out which standing positions would give him the most horizontal body parts for players to travel across. The setting led itself naturally to the premise of the game's story, in which the body of the one god, Bionis, has become a lush and verdant landmass, fostering humanlike "homs" and other organic species. But a darker sort of evolution has been occurring on the inorganic corpse of the other god, Mechonis, whose mechanical offspring have begun crossing the bridge between the gods—the sword that



Unleashes the power of the Monado.

Mechonis thrust into Bionis's chest—to wipe out homanity.

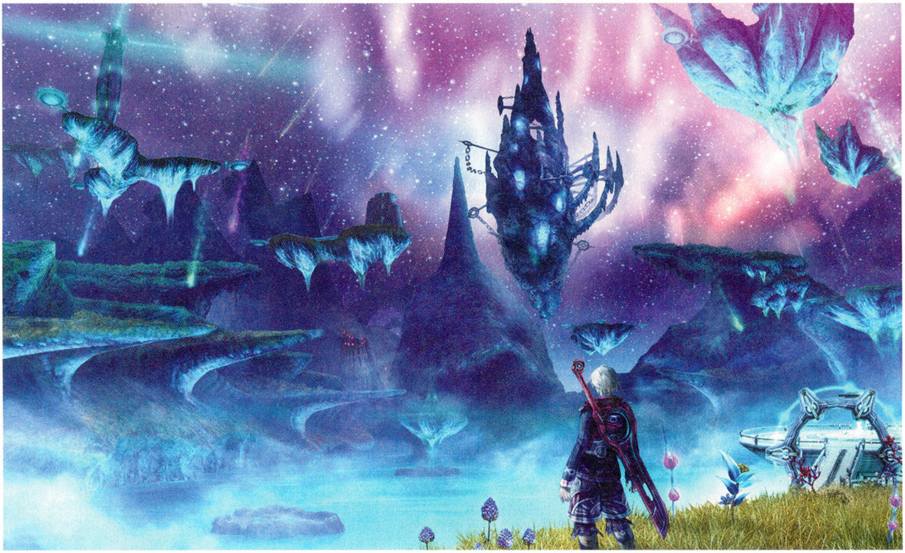
The hom colonies are ill-prepared for invasion, and have struggles enough surviving the wide variety of monsters that have evolved on Bionis. But they do have a trump card: The Monado, the sword that Bionis wielded in battle, now shrunk down to handy hom size. In addition to doing a fine job of chopping through mechanical flesh, The Monado grants its wielders the ability to see the future, providing tantalizing hints of the plot and, more usefully, a sneak peak at any enemy attack that would result in the death of one of your party members (see the "Prophecy in Action" sidebar). With that in hand, hero Shulk and his friends from the hom outpost of Colony 9 set off on a journey that will take them up the legs, back, shoulders, and even head of their god, making contact with long-lost societies and uncovering the ancient secrets of their world. It's pretty epic stuff, and one of the most original settings for a video game ever conceived. Is there any other game in which the heroes look out into the night sky and, instead of seeing the usual fantasy moons and constellations, gaze upon the distant arms and chest of the god on which they're standing, while the glowering eyes of another god stare back at them?

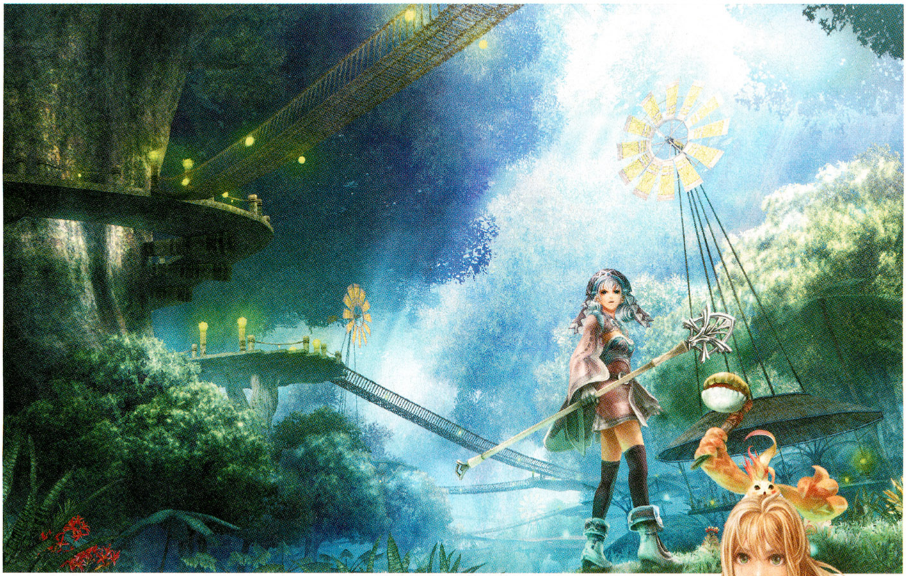
"People often ask what influenced the world design of Xenoblade Chronicles," says Takahashi, who famously tapped the works of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche for his Xenosaga series. "Honestly, the answer is 'nothing.' I myself have no idea where the idea came from."

COMBAT BASICS

AGGRO AND POSITIONING

Instead of attacking at random, monsters—quite logically—tend to go after the character who harms them the most. The problem is, your characters tend to be either beefy or powerful, not both at once, so there's a lot of strategy involved in having your strongest characters keep a low profile while their more resilient allies distract foes with taunts and pester them with weaker attacks. Once the opposition takes the bait, your strikers have a perfect opportunity to slip around distracted foes and dish out attacks that deal extra damage from behind or the side.

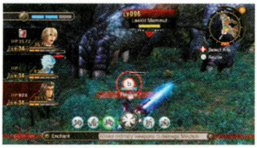


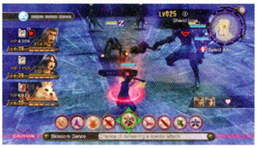


COMBAT BASICS

TEAMWORK IS THE KEY

You have direct control of only your party leaders, but Xenoblade Chronicles still encourages players to watch their comrades' backs. When a character whiffs an attack or takes a bad hit, a well-timed word of encouragement will bolster his spirits and strengthen the relationship between companions. If a character get stunned or put to sleep, a tap on the shoulder will get him back in the fight. Team members can even dip into the game's Party Gauge to dish out special group attacks or revive each other.

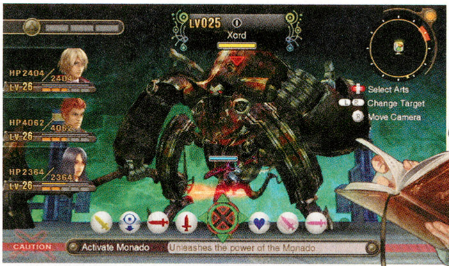


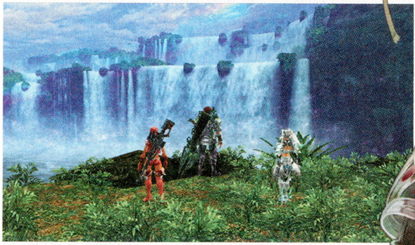


THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

Takahashi has a bit more insight into what inspired the Western-RPG feel of Xenoblade Chronicles. Unlike most Japanese-made RPGs, the game affords players a great deal of freedom to make the quest their own. It does feature a single, linear story with a preset outcome, but players are always given dozens of options in place of following the automap arrow to the next plot point. Exploring is the most satisfying part of Xenoblade Chronicles, and the game lavishes rewards on players who do it, offering plentiful hidden items and dishing out experience points not just for killing foes, but for discovering the landmarks and secret spots in each game area.

Takahashi says that this structure wasn't influenced by specific Western games, but is more the result of a common philosophy. "I think that because Western RPGs were originally derived from tabletop RPGs, the ultimate goal of the genre has been to create worlds for players to inhabit that are indistinguishable from reality. And in fact, that's the same goal that inspired me to get involved in game development. I suspect the





In any other game that might be a painted backdrop, but in Xenoblade Chronicles you can leap from the cliff and swim to the falls.

reason Xenoblade Chronicles ended up resembling Western-style RPGs is that it was designed to be a step toward a goal that is held by so many Western developers."

Additionally, Takahashi's team seems to have been eager to throw away the dated trappings of the traditional JRPG formula. Battles don't require fast-action reflexes, but do take place in real time, and occur directly on the field of exploration instead of whisking players off to some parallel dimension. Players can save whenever and wherever they want instead of having to hunt down periodically spaced glowing obelisks. The game discards traditional conventions of HP and MP management, as well—hit points refill automatically between battles, and magic points don't exist at all; special abilities are balanced with mandatory cool-down periods instead.

TESTING THE WATERS

Upon its Japanese release, Xenoblade Chronicles quickly became one of the most talked-about games of the entire hardware generation. A year and a half later, it still holds the highest aggregate user-review score of any Wii title on the major Japanese review sites. It met with a similarly enthusiastic response when released in Europe, earning a spot among Metacritic's 10 highest-rated Wii games of all time.

When Nintendo announced a few months ago that it had no plans to release Xenoblade Chronicles on these shores, North American RPG fans despaired that the game their overseas brethren held in such high regard would forever evade their grasp. Thankfully, Nintendo of America has reversed that decision, and in April will be releasing the title exclusively at GameStop stores and Nintendo's own online shop. It's essentially the European version of the game, so expect a lot of British accents and idioms—but beggars can't be choosers.

Takahashi admits that he expected the warm reception his game received from RPG fans in his native land. What he didn't see coming was the reaction across the Pacific: "I couldn't figure out why they would care so much about a game like Xenoblade Chronicles when they had so many superior RPGs to choose from in the West." But the titles Takahashi mentions—Red Dead Redemption and the Mass Effect and Elder Scrolls series—only serve to illustrate why Americans need games like Xenoblade Chronicles too. Sure, Western developers make fantastic open-world games, but what if you want slower-paced, strategic battles instead of shooter-style action? What if you prefer colorful, fantastical words to photorealistic ones? What if you like your heroes lighthearted instead of gritty? And what if you'd rather have upbeat, engaging music in place of a generic film-score soundtrack? For all the JRPG genre's recent failings, these are still things that only Japanese RPG makers seem interested in providing.

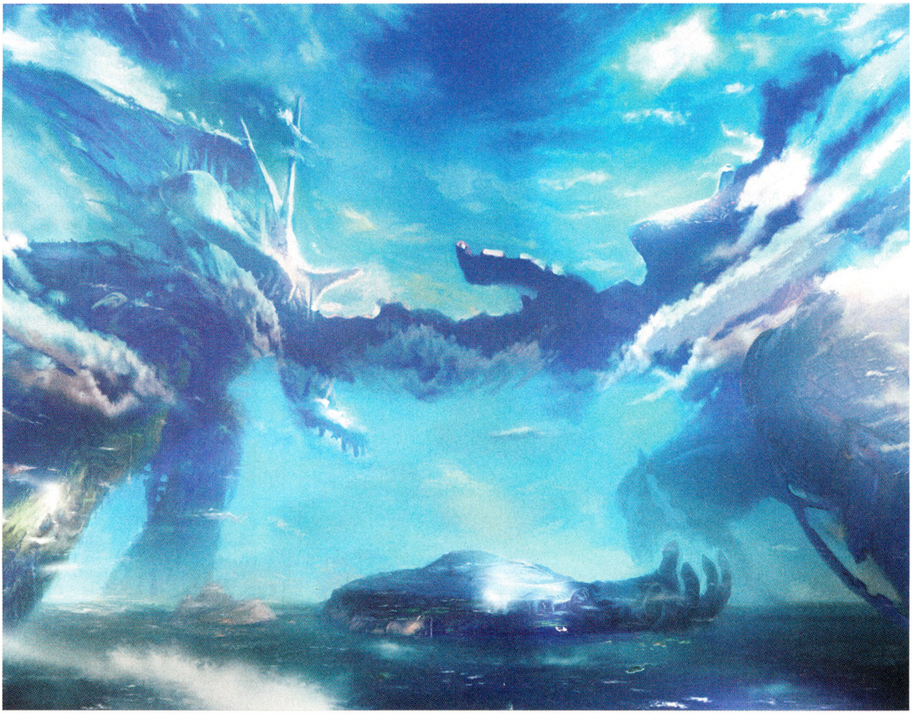
While Takahashi is grateful for the game's positive reputation, he's quick to point out that he and his team didn't set out to make Xenoblade Chronicles into the company's magnum opus. It was made to be an experiment; a trial balloon to assess the demand for JRPGs that put world-building front and center and prioritized substance over spectacle. Takahashi confirms dryly, "I believe our experiment has been a success."

COMBAT BASICS

PROPHECY IN ACTION

Vague prophecies of the future have become something of a cliché in fantasy RPGs, and The Monado Blade shows its bearers plenty of those. But there's nothing vague about the way the blade works in combat: any time an enemy attack would claim the life of one of your party members, the sword will show it happening several seconds in advance. That's just enough time for you to refocus your strategy to kill the attacker or slap it with a status condition, or use a healing or defensive technique to save the target's life.

Activate Monado
Unleashes the power of the Monado



Sharpening the 'Blade

Tetsuya Takahashi began his career at noted RPG developer Falcom before moving to Square Enix, and worked on the art teams of such genre-defining games as Chrono Trigger, Secret of Mana, and Final Fantasy IV through VII. When Squaresoft declined to build a franchise out of his directorial debut, Xenogears for the PlayStation, Takahashi left the company to help found developer Monolith Soft. After creating the Namco-published Xenosaga trilogy, Takahashi led Monolith Soft—now a first-party Nintendo developer—in the creation of Xenoblade Chronicles.

NINTENDO POWER How has the way you approach telling stories in video games evolved since your work on Xenogears and Xenosaga?

TETSUYA TAKAHASHI To be honest, there are times when I think I've atrophied as a writer since the Xenogears era. For example, take a story sequence like, "a massive meteorite falls into a city, obliterating everything within 100 kilometers." Thirteen years ago, I would have written something like that without a moment's hesitation. But now I get caught up in viewing it from so many perspectives outside of that of a writer: How much would it cost to develop the city? How many people would we need to model the pieces of rubble and program the explosion effects? Should we hire additional employees to do it, or just outsource it? And it isn't just visual-effects scenes; I find myself thinking the same sorts of thoughts about the event scenes that would be necessary to develop each character that I create.

There's no doubt that sort of thinking affects the development of my stories to some extent, but if I'm not realistic about that sort of thing—for example, if the story is more ambitious than the budget will allow—then the whole project will fail. I often find myself thinking, "One of these days, I'd love to free myself from these sorts of restraints and write whatever I truly want to write," but I think for that to happen, I'd first need to make a game that was a hit not just in Japan, but also in the West—and especially in the industry's largest market, North America.

You seem to have a very specific vision for what you want to achieve in your games. With Xenoblade Chronicles, how close do you feel you came to achieving that vision?

In terms of how close we came to achieving the original vision for the game Xenoblade Chronicles, I'd say it's pretty close to 100%. The qualifier there is that there are a few minor things I wish we could have done, like made the user interface easier to use, added a bestiary, and had all of the event scenes use the full-spec models.

But in terms of my own personal goal—my vision of an ideal game—I'd honestly have to say that it's barely 5% of the way there. My goal is to re-create the world itself. I think it's valuable to always develop projects with such lofty goals in mind.

What aspect of the Xenoblade Chronicles development proved the most challenging?
The hardest part was simply getting everything done. There's a Japanese parable about a cricket trying to swim across a puddle, in which the cricket gives up and swims back the way it came, even though it had already swum halfway across. The meaning is that people embark on new ventures with lots of enthusiasm, but often give up, even when they should have gone all the way. I think that this is a very common situation in Japanese game development. I understand that there are all sorts of reasons why it happens, related to development costs and changing circumstances, but I also feel that this is connected to the malaise that Japanese RPGs have found themselves in.

With Xenoblade Chronicles, we were able to finish the job, and do everything we had wanted to do. That was an incredible challenge, and I have to imagine that's true not only for us, but also for Nintendo, who allowed us to go the distance.

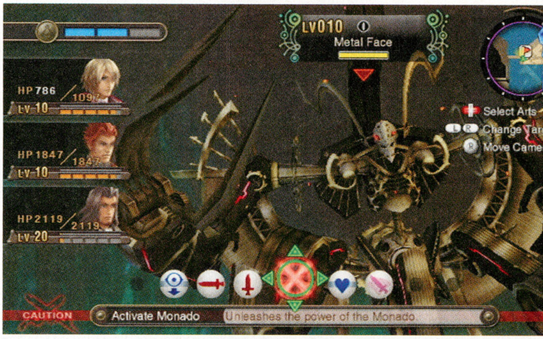
What were your primary goals with the battle system for Xenoblade Chronicles?
Our primary goal was to move beyond turn-based battles. We also wanted to make sure that the NPC characters who were supporting the player character would behave in ways that clearly expressed their individuality. Having them speak so much during combat was another way of reinforcing that goal.

In a game like this, how do you balance the players' desire for freedom with the need to tell an engaging story?
Intuition. I know that may sound a little irresponsible, but after spending a quarter of a century creating games and making lots of mistakes, the intuition that I've cultivated by ruminating on those mistakes is everything to me. Now, I certainly don't think it's perfect. My intuition is still developing, and next time I expect that it will be even more accurate.

Why did you decide to assemble a team of composers for the soundtrack instead of using just one?
I believe that music is an extremely important element to games. I honestly don't think that it's an exaggeration to say that music can make the difference between a good game and a bad one.

Every composer has strong points and weak points. On this project, we explored the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of composers, and then assigned the ideal composer for each piece of music we wanted.

Xenoblade Chronicles is considered to be one of only a few critically successful Japanese RPGs this generation. In your opinion, where has the genre gone wrong?
Since Japan is a relatively small market, its development system—just as it is with movies—isn't set up for developing the sort of mega-budget projects that are common in the West. It's often said that a fun game is born not from money, but from good ideas, and certainly that is often the case. However, when you're dealing with the RPG genre, which revolves around constructing entire worlds, there are lots of times when having good ideas just isn't enough. I don't believe that this is some all-encompassing truth from which there is no possibility of escape, but I do



Quest
Target

consider it to be a valid excuse.

Now, personally, I can't help but think that the reason the industry is in this sorry state is because everyone has just accepted that excuse and, sapped of their spirit to challenge new things, has just decided to kick back and coast on their past successes.

I like to think of this as the "*Mito Komon*-ification" of the industry. *Mito Komon* is a Japanese TV drama set in the Edo period of Japanese history, which boasted of running for over 40 consecutive years [*1,227 episodes! -ed*], but which just recently aired its final episode. In my opinion, it was cancelled because after 40 years of telling similar stories over and over again, the audience got sick of it, and it never managed to adapt to the changing times.

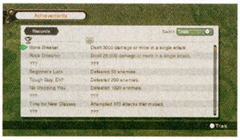
My point is that if most JRPGs—regardless of the size of their budgets—have abandoned any attempt at progress and retreated to the safety of past successes, then isn't that the real reason the world is moving on without them?

How do you feel the RPG genre will need to evolve to stay relevant in the future?
I know that this is a pretty radical idea, but I think the future of the genre is world creation that is good enough to be the equivalent of reality.

I'm sure that if games ever did evolve to that point, it would cause all sorts of problem in the real world, like in that old movie *Brainstorm*. But as a game creator, I'm constantly thinking about how much I'd like to advance the genre to that point.

Over the course of Xenoblade Chronicles, players explore the world so thoroughly that it doesn't leave much room for a sequel. Do you have any thoughts as to how you might build it into a series?
Do you really think so? I always build room for sequels into all of my games.

Is there anything else that that you'd like to say to our readers?
Lately, I feel that in the rest of the world, branding Japanese-made RPGs as "JRPGs" has become a form of mockery. It is certainly true that there are many games that, as the critics say, have given up on trying to evolve. On the other hand, it's also true that there are lots of Japanese-made RPGs that, like Japanese cars and Japanese electronics, have had tremendous care put into their development, in aspects like the their user interfaces, their control schemes, and that those aspects are something that Japanese people can take pride in. I see Xenoblade Chronicles as the touchstone that will lead to Monolith Soft being able to exploit those strengths while also embracing worldwide trends. The look and feel of the game may differ from Western RPGs, but there are also many aspects to it that will feel familiar. I would be honored if you would give it a try, and get a glimpse of my vision for the future of Japanese RPGs.



Achievements

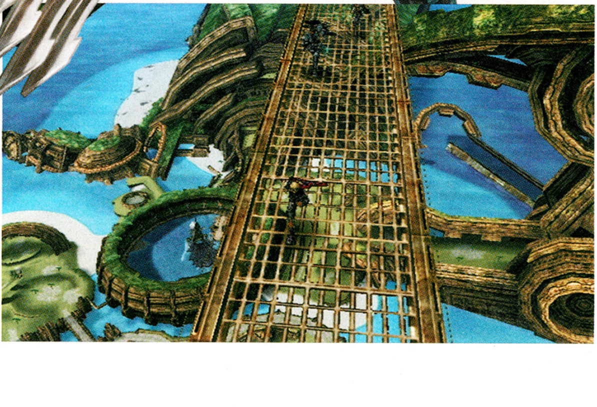
Records

Switch Trials

Bone Breaker	Dealt 3000 damage or more in a single attack.
Rock Smasher	Dealt 25,000 damage or more in a single attack.
???	???
Beginner's Luck	Defeated 50 enemies.
Tough Guy, Eh?	Defeated 200 enemies.
No Stopping You	Defeated 1000 enemies.
???	???
Time for New Glasses	Attempted 300 attacks that missed.
???	???

Trials

An in-game achievement system provides hundreds of objectives for those seeking greater challenges.



"THE HISTORY OF LIGHT AND SHADOW WILL BE WRITTEN IN BLOOD!"

—GANONDORF, THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS, 2006

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MEDIA WITH PASSION

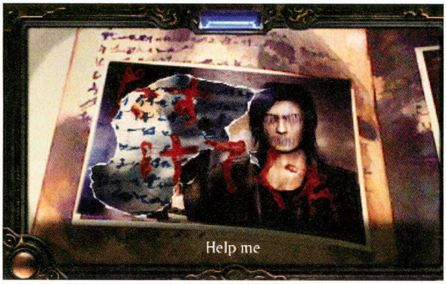
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

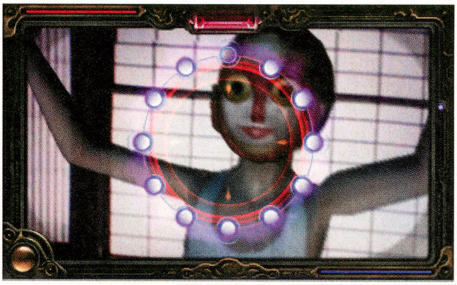
Augmented-reality game **Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir** puts your Nintendo 3DS system to use revealing the ghosts that haunt the world around you.

BY **JUSTIN CHENG**

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **TECMO KOEI/NINTENDO** RELEASE: **APRIL 2012**

N3DS





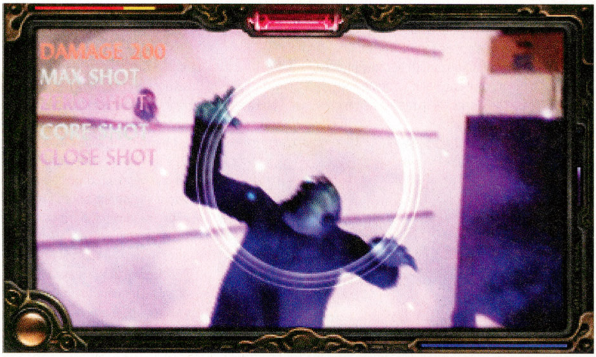
Ghosts are everywhere. You can't see them with the naked eye, but they're lurking all around you. Fortunately, Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir turns your Nintendo 3DS system into a device that can reveal them. In particular, the stereoscopic handheld's camera serves as a window to the dead and is the weapon you use to dispel any wrathful wraiths you encounter.

The idea of using a camera to defeat ghosts isn't new, of course; it's what separated the acclaimed Fatal Frame series from other survival-horror titles. But with Spirit Camera—a new horror title that takes place in the Fatal Frame universe—Tecmo Koei and Nintendo have made the camera-as-a-ghostbusting-device concept more immersive than ever before. In this augmented-reality (AR) game, you physically move the N3DS as you search for specters in your real-world surroundings.

As cool as that is, though, it's only half of what Spirit Camera is about. This title also comes with a 16-page AR book. Designed to look like an old, weathered diary and filled with slightly unsettling illustrations and photos of CGI people and objects, the book is an essential component of the Spirit Camera experience. In fact, the story kicks off with you receiving both the book and a Camera Obscura (the game's name for your N3DS camera). After you point the camera at the first page in the diary—lining up the circular reticle with the circular target on the page—the words "I've been waiting" appear, and you are pulled into another world that resembles a Japanese-style house. You are constantly moving forward, but you can look around freely by moving the N3DS—not that you can see much in the dimly lit hallway you start out in. Continuing forward, you see a woman in a white dress float across your path. Undaunted, you walk onward until you come to a door. When you move to open it, you hear a voice yelling at you not to do so. The screen goes dark, and when the lights come back on you see the woman in the white dress in front of you before you're brought back to reality.

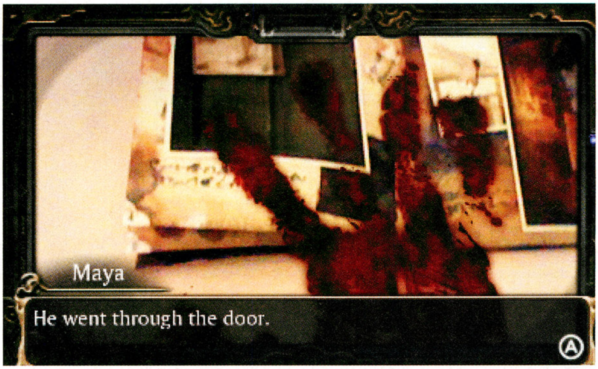
SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

You don't return alone, however. Somehow the woman has entered the real world. Just because she's a spirit doesn't mean she's unfriendly; she tells you that her name is Maya, that she's been trapped in the house for a long time, and that



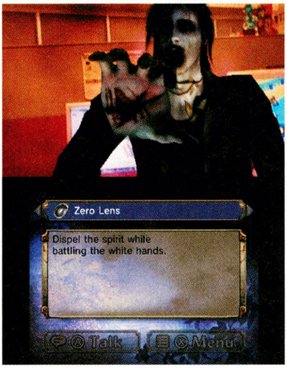
You don't need an unlicensed nuclear accelerator to bust ghosts; you just need a camera.

NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.



Maya

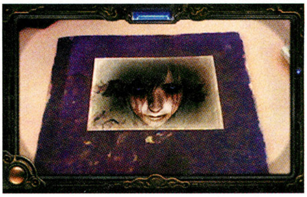
He went through the door.



Zero Lens

Dispel the spirit while battling the white hands.

Spirit Camera's augmented-reality features make it feel like the ghosts are in the room with you.



an evil woman in black is behind the door you just tried to open. The woman in black imprisons people in the house and takes their faces. She's not the only problem you have, though; you hear a man's voice that Maya tells you is coming from the diary.

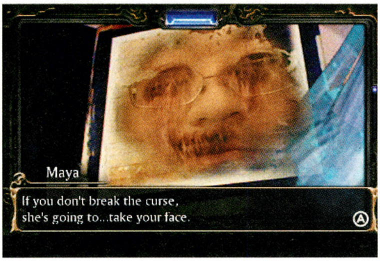
You crack open the book, turn to the page with the picture of a man on it, and once again line up your camera's reticle on the target. The man's face changes; his eyes and mouth become blurred, almost as if the picture had been scratched out in those areas. The words "help me"—seemingly written in blood—develop over the picture, and a ghost with its eyes and mouth scratched out materializes in your immediate vicinity.

Once you've located the ghost (the onscreen arrows point you in the right direction), you have to get it in the middle of your viewfinder. When the phantasm attacks, the reticle turns red; you need to hit the shutter button (R or L) at that point to block—the game calls this Shutter Chance—or else you'll take damage. The longer you have the reticle over your target, the more Spirit Power you charge up. And the more Spirit Power you build up, the more damage you'll deal when you perform Shutter Chance.

TAKE A LOOK; IT'S IN A BOOK

After beating this ghost and reading the memo you receive, you learn that he was a man named Kaito Hasebe who was searching for his missing sister. The only clue he had was the diary. As he was investigating, he wrote about seeing the photo of a door with a bloody handprint on it. He started hallucinating about this door before he was eventually imprisoned in the diary. His tale of woe isn't enough to scare you off, however. You and Maya decide to find out what's behind the door.

Following in Kaito's footsteps, you flip to the page with the



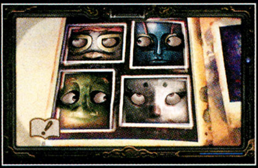
Maya

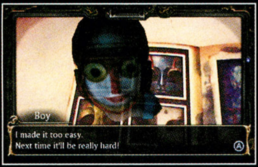
If you don't break the curse, she's going to...take your face.

DIARY OF THE DEAD

The 16-page AR book that comes with Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir might be frightening to flip through, but it has a central role in the story—and it allows you to play some minigames in the Cursed Pages mode. (We could test out only two of the four.)

The minigame titled Four Strange Masks has you searching for the ghost of a boy whose face is covered with a mask. (This boy is also in the story mode.) A page in the AR book has four different masks, and he is hiding in one of them. To catch him you have to follow his instructions and pay close attention to the eyes that appear in the masks.

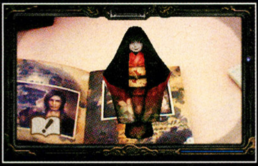


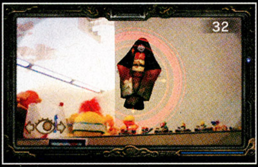


Boy

I made it too easy.
Next time it'll be really hard!

The Haunted Doll minigame tasks you with searching high and low to take a photo of a specific doll. Just make sure you pick the right one before you snap the picture, as there are several lookalikes floating about.



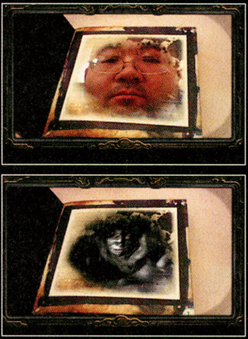


SAY CHEESE

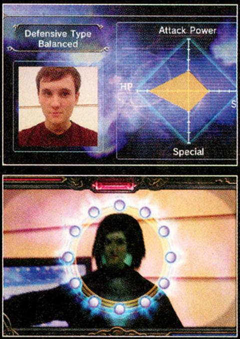
Most of Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir relies on using the AR book, but you can play one mode without it: Haunted Visions, which is broken up into three modes.

In Spirit Photography, you take pictures as normal and then supernatural stuff happens to the photos you've taken.

Spirit Check has you taking a photo of yourself or your friends to reveal the spirit that might be haunting you or your pals.



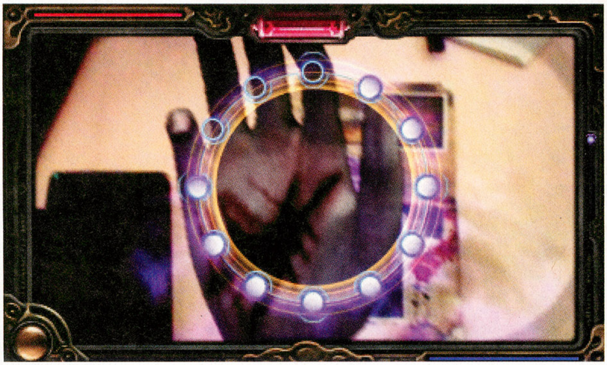
After you've taken a photo of someone's face in Spirit Challenge, a ghost with that face will try to attack you. You must use the Camera Obscura to dispel it.

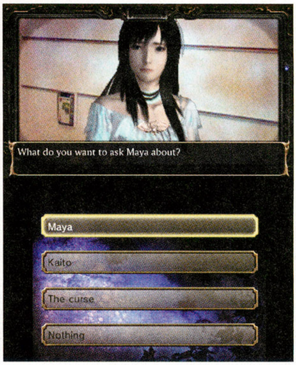


picture of a door and look at it through the camera. A bloody handprint emerges, inviting you to place your own hand over it (as if you were pushing open the door). Suddenly, a zombielike hand pops up and tries to grab your hand. This new foe won't let you pass, so you'll have to defeat it by aiming your shots at its palm so you can proceed.

With the skirmish over, you enter the door—only to have Kaito rush out at you. You must dispatch him again, but this time he has some backup in the form of floating hands that reach out to attack you. Once you've dispelled all the ghosts, you get a message from the lady in black: a picture of your face (which you had to take the minute you started up the game) appears on a page in the diary, and then the picture transforms so that your eyes and mouth are scratched out in a similar manner to Kaito's. Maya tells you that you've been cursed and that you have to break the curse or lose your face. The one good thing to come of all this is that you unlock a new lens for your camera—the Purple Mirror Lens. By pressing left or right on the Control Pad, you can swap to this new lens, which gives you access to new areas in the diary. This violet-hued lens is not meant for combat, however, as only the default Zero Lens (which is perhaps a reference to Fatal Frame's original Japanese title, Zero) allows you to charge up Spirit Power.

This just scratches the surface of what Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir has in store. There are many more mysteries to be uncovered and many more ghosts to vanquish. We can't wait to get back to it, if only to lift this curse and ensure we keep our faces.





What do you want to ask Maya about?

Maya

Kaito

The curse

Nothing

NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

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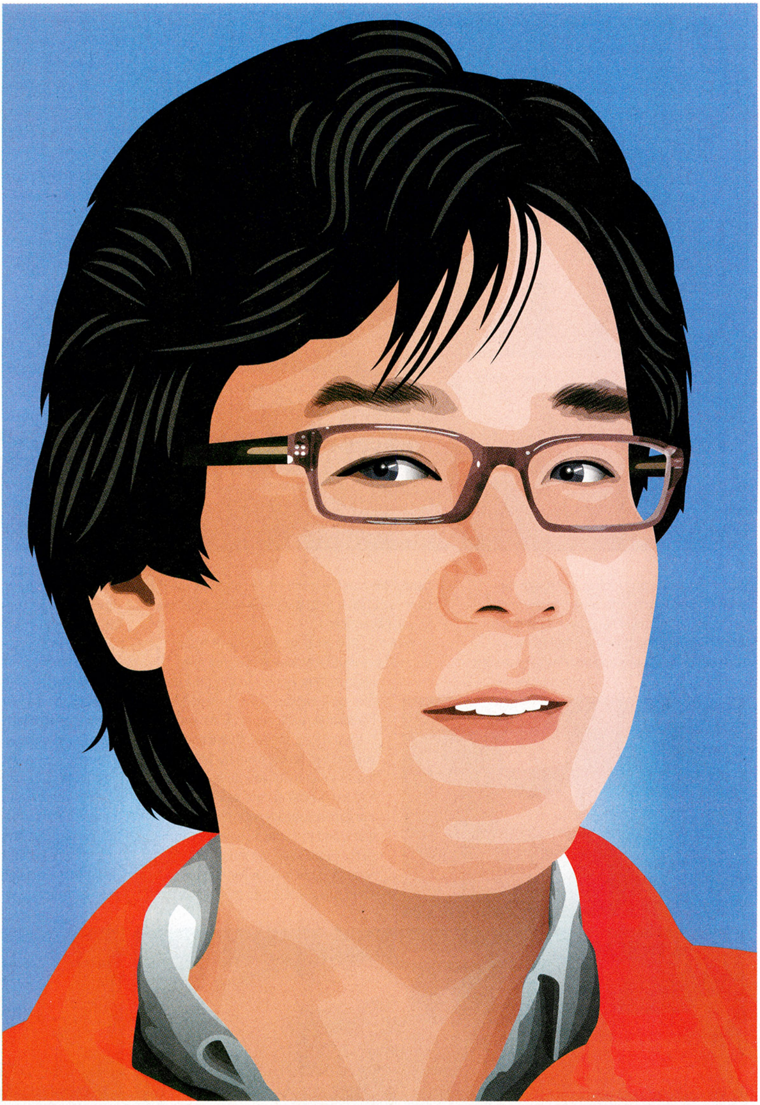
Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
October 12, 1965

BIRTHPLACE
Tokyo, Japan

POSITION
Senior Game Designer, Namco Bandai

BEST KNOWN FOR
Co-creating Sonic the Hedgehog; not being the best-known co-creator of Sonic the Hedgehog

FAVORITE FOOD
Stout coffee, buckwheat noodles

CURRENT PROJECTS
Top secret

Hirokazu Yasuhara

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Though his name may not be as familiar as those of fellow Sonic creators Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima, Hirokazu Yasuhara is no less responsible for the Blue Blur's success. He was the lead designer on each of the mainline Sonic games for Sega Genesis, crafting some of the best platformer gameplay this side of Mario. Yasuhara later brought his talents to Naughty Dog, where he contributed to the critically acclaimed Jak and Uncharted franchises. Most recently the veteran developer joined Namco Bandai's US offices. His current projects remain shrouded in secrecy, but given his near-flawless track record, we can't wait to see what he has in store for us next.

NINTENDO POWER
How did you originally get into the video game business?

HIROKAZU YASUHARA
When I was a kid, there were neither personal computers nor consumer game machines. I was an ordinary kid who played outside or read comics. The first video game I played was Breakout at the local arcade. I was about 10 years old. My first experience with computers was at college when I studied machine engineering and designing. Nintendo had become popular among young people at that time, but I was not attracted to consumer games. I loved roller coasters and other fun rides at the amusement park, and I wanted to create those machines after college. I loved movies and theatrical performances, as well, so I was also interested in creating theatrical settings or designing stage mechanics for theatrical plays.

I first became interested in the game industry because of Sega's Space Harrier. I was impressed by the power of the specialized computer hardware the game used. So after I graduated from college, I knocked on Sega's door and was hired as a rookie. I was trained in programming and computer graphics for the first three months after being employed there. As I said, my major in college was machine engineering and design, so I was told that I would be assigned to the arcade-machine R&D division. But Sega was making plans to launch the Genesis at the time and was putting more resources into its consumer R&D division. So I was sent to Genesis R&D and started life at Sega with disappointment because I had come to Sega for its arcade machines.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
When I was a kid, my dream was being a comic-writer or an inventor of toys. The video game industry as it's known today did not exist in the world yet.

> *"I was sent to Genesis R&D and started life at Sega with disappointment because I had come to Sega for its arcade machines."*

In your early games, you were credited as Carol Yas. Where did that nickname come from?
When I was at university, I was a member of a graphic-novel circle. Somebody said that my drawings were similar to that of Emiko "Carol" Shimoda. Her art was well-known in the late '80s in Japan. So everyone in the circle started calling me Carol. At Sega, only pseudonyms were allowed in the staff credits as an unwritten rule of the industry in the '80s and '90s, so I used that name.

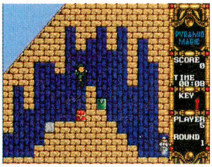
You co-created the Sonic the Hedgehog franchise. Can you talk a little bit about how Sonic Team was originally formed and how you came to be one of the founding members?
In the beginning, my two colleagues at Sega, Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima, were starting a new character-game project. I knew what sort of technical demonstration they were making, but I hadn't officially worked with them on the project yet. At the time, I did not have a specific project that I was working on, and I was supposed to go to the United States in a few weeks to establish a new R&D team with famous game creator Mark Cerny. But then the first Gulf War broke out and my move to the US was postponed for three months. In the meantime, for the character-game project, Naka, a programmer, and Oshima, an artist, needed a full-time game designer on the project because it was not yet taking shape as a game. They learned that I was free for three months, and asked me for help designing the game until my departure. So I officially joined the project as a game designer, planning to work on it only until I went to the US. But I ended up staying in Japan for a year until we finished the project.

It seems like one of the biggest difficulties in crafting a Sonic game would be making the level design work with the character's trademark speed. Was that a challenge? And what was your overarching philosophy of designing a Sonic level?
Everybody thinks the most interesting aspect of Sonic is his speed. This may be true. But I, as the game designer, thought that speed alone was not enough to excite players. Speed is a relative issue, so if the game screen moves with the character at the same pace, people won't recognize any speed. I say the most important element of showing speed is "dazzle." This was the key concept I intended to realize in the game. To do so, I designed stages and mechanics around the contrasting concepts of "go faster,"

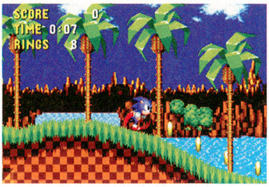
GAMEOGRAPHY

Yasuhara's first-ever assignment was to help port arcade classic Altered Beast to the Sega Genesis. Since then, he's tended toward games with a strong platforming component, from Sonic the Hedgehog to Uncharted: Drake's Fortune.

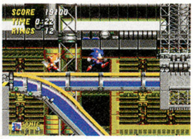
ALTERED BEAST
1989, SEGA GENESIS
GAME PLANNER



PYRAMID MAGIC
1991, SEGA GENESIS (JAPAN ONLY)
GAME PLANNER

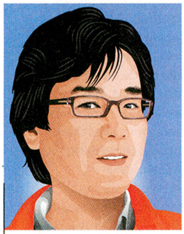


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
1991, SEGA GENESIS
GAME PLANNER



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
1992, SEGA GENESIS
GAME PLANNER

Power Profiles



"stop," and "bounce back suddenly" to let players feel constantly dazzled by controlling the character.

It succeeded in that the dazzling feeling left people with a very strong impression and a sense of excitement. The most important goal that I achieved was to create a unique, cool, and fun character game that represents what Sega was about on the Genesis. That was the high concept behind the creation of Sonic. So I put in the game many elements of what Sega represented and what the company would represent in the future.

We've heard that you worked on the ill-fated Sonic X-treme project for the Sega Saturn. Is that true?
Unfortunately, I didn't do much work on Sonic X-treme. I just gave the development team some suggestions and comments. I think the project had a very talented programmer, but it was not ultimately put on a release track.

However, I once made a design document and stage maps for an unreleased action-puzzle game featuring Sonic and Tails for Game Gear. It was never shown to the public.

Sonic celebrated his 20th anniversary in 2011. What sorts of emotions does that evoke for you?
I felt that I was really blessed with so many wonderful fans. I just have honest gratitude for all people who have sincerely supported Sonic the Hedgehog for such a long time. And, especially, I want to say thanks to all development-team members of Sonic titles, not only within Sega, but also at other companies who have been taking care of Sonic so nicely and keeping him alive for more than two decades.

At last year's E3, you were reunited with Sonic co-creators Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima for the franchise's 25th anniversary party. What was that experience like, and do you keep up with your fellow Sonic Team founders?
A couple weeks before E3, I got an email from Oshima, and it said, "Hope to see you at the E3." When we got together at the show, he said, "Let's have dinner around here" then brought me to the 20th-anniversary party. It was a true surprise to me. It was nice to catch up on their recent activities. I had a chance to chat with many young Sonic Team members, and I got to express my thanks to them for their very best efforts.

You also worked on the Jak and Daxter series at Naughty Dog. Did you find it reinvigorating to work on something new after spending so many years with Sonic? And were there any specific lessons you learned from designing Sonic titles that you were able to apply to your work on Jak?
This isn't a direct answer to your question, but before I joined Naughty Dog, Sega sent me to Disney. This was because Sega was researching possibilities for starting a theme-park business at the time. I learned so much about the entertainment business, design of amusement parks, and the philosophy of "creation" from Disney. That experience provided me with new internal frameworks, and it became my second backbone for designing video games. It gave me sort of a formula to design entertainment content.

When I joined Naughty Dog, I was surprised to find that it had almost the same development style that Sega had in Tokyo. So I could work at Naughty Dog in the same style I had at Sega. I could use the design techniques I acquired from my Sonic and Disney experiences, and at the same time, I could also learn the ins and outs of 3D games by developing Jak and Daxter. I met so many nice and talented people there. I appreciate how much they helped and supported me to realize my ideas in the Jak series.

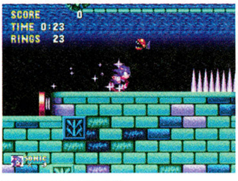
Given your success with the genre, we'd love to know what you view as the key to making a great platformer.
I think it is hard to say in short. I guess a designer should have an approach of "hospitality" for their players. It is important to show a player what he or she should do in stages clearly and continually if you are the game's host. Always imagine the view from the player's perspective. Also, it is important for the designer to consider the rhythm that a human being has naturally in life; maybe it relates to the speed of heartbeats, timing of breath, etc. Check through the game yourself again and again, so you can come to know what might be wrong in the project. All issues of game design are related to your sense of "hospitality" for players.

Why did the Jak series drift away from its platforming roots after the first installment?
The atmosphere was shifted to matured players, but I don't think it drifted so much from the basic gameplay system of the original. The changes were a way to stay current with trends and let the series evolve. In that Jak's tools function as an extension of his arms and legs in the game, I think it was a success.

> *"All issues of game design are related to [a developer's] sense of 'hospitality' for players."*

After the original Sonic the Hedgehog was completed, you moved to the United States, and if we're not mistaken, you've been here ever since. Was there something in particular about developing games in the US that made you want to stay?
As you know, video games were born in the US. As I said before, the first game that got my attention was Breakout when I was 10 years old. And I guess

GAMEOGRAPHY



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3
1994, SEGA GENESIS
DIRECTOR

SCORE 0
TIME 0:17
RINGS 17

SONIC & KNUCKLES
1994, SEGA GENESIS
DIRECTOR

000
00:11:93
0/5

SONIC R
1997, SEGA SATURN
MAP DESIGN DIRECTOR

Speak
Point
Punch

FLOIGAN BROS.: EPISODE 1
2001, DREAMCAST
GAME DESIGNER

somewhere in my mind, I always longed to go the US. So, my childhood fantasy was realized. These days, nobody can deny that the San Francisco Bay Area, where I live, is a constant source of amazing new inventions and new ideas from talented people. Also, I get to be on top of the latest tech rumors all the time. Those advantages attract me a lot, so I want to enjoy soaking in such an innovative atmosphere for a while. And I have many friends here too; that is the biggest reason, I think.

You previously mentioned Mark Cerny, with whom you've spent much of your career collaborating. How did that relationship develop? Do you find that the two of you are usually on the same page?
When I joined Sega of Japan, he was already working there. We became friends and created a downloadable game together in the late '80s called Pyramid Magic. Looking back on it now, it was too early to distribute downloadable games. I designed the game and Mark programmed it. He wrote a very compact code for the game, but unfortunately, his original code is gone. Incidentally, old Sega fans may be interested to know that Myau Choko and Judy Totoya drew art for the game.

As I mentioned before, when Mark established the R&D office called Sega Technical Institute in Palo Alto, he invited me to the US. I thought that I would make an original character game with him there. But Sonic turned out to be a huge hit and that opportunity vanished for the time being.

It was reported a while ago that you joined Namco Bandai to work on a new Pac-Man project. Is that still in the works, and if so, how's it coming along?
It was sort of a slip of the tongue that I'm working on a Pac-Man project. And actually, I'm working on some other projects in parallel with that one.

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started?
More than two decades ago, it was easy to establish a development team with just a few people. Nowadays, game creation needs a big system of human resources. But on the other hand, with the spread of [new devices and digital delivery services], we've returned to an era in which people can create games with a few fellows. It's amazing that there are so many varied opportunities to make games for creators all around the world.

What aspect of the video game development process do you enjoy the most?
I enjoy all parts of the process. In particular, though, I like the first moment that a hero character stands on a stage in the game editor and we get to make him run around in the world. It's so exciting—the moment of birth of a new "universe." I also enjoy making block meshes for stage maps in Maya. I don't know why, but it relaxes me.

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while creating a game, what's your process for working through it?
I've experienced so many difficult problems that occur during projects. I always prepare a Plan B in parallel when I make my main plan. Plus, I sometimes make a Plan C and a Plan D, just in case. It is important to arrange flexible plans as a designer. If a problem pops up, not only do I offer my Plan B to my team members, but I also communicate with them and gather their opinions and suggestions to find the best solution.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
That would be Mr. Miyamoto. When I made the first Sonic, he told me, "Congratulations" face-to-face at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. At that moment, I felt that I was approved to be in this industry as a game designer. If I hadn't met him there, I don't know that I would still be working in the video game industry today.

> *"If I hadn't met [Mr. Miyamoto]... I don't know that I would still be working in the video game industry today."*

If you weren't making video games, what do you think you'd be doing?
I would probably be a structural-design engineer or an industrial designer. I still design amusement structures in my brain; not only large roller coasters but also stuff like a small swing or a bench in a park.

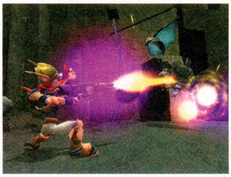
Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
I have so many films, authors, and artists that I admire, so it is hard to pick one among them. But I will say that I like the works of Theo Jansen, who is a Dutch kinetic sculptor. His large artificial animal skeletons, which realized fusion of art and engineering, really impress me. And recently, I bought Kotori Kawashima's photo book entitled *Mirai-chan.* I've never seen such a photogenic little girl, and she makes me smile a lot. It has the energy of pure life.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
It is not a hobby, per se, but I enjoy spending time at coffee shops in San Francisco. I'm glad there are such great coffee shops nearby, like the Blue Bottle and Four Barrel. Also, I like listening to traditional Irish songs. One of my friends lent me a CD of The Bothy Band more than a decade ago, and it got me into that world. Their tunes are high-pitched and have a great deal of energy, and yet they relax and soothe me, strange to say. When I retire, I want to visit Ireland to listen to live "sessuns." And I enjoy watching TED [Technology Entertainment and Design] conferences on the Net, just for learning about cutting-edge ideas on the present world. I find new favorite tips every day by browsing the Web.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
Detoxification of radiation. I want to save the children of Fukushima.

GAMEOGRAPHY

JAK II
2003, PLAYSTATION 2
GAME DESIGNER


JAK 3
2004, PLAYSTATION 2
GAME DESIGNER

JAK X: COMBAT RACING
2005, PLAYSTATION 2
GAME DESIGNER

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE
2007, PLAYSTATION 3
GAME DESIGNER

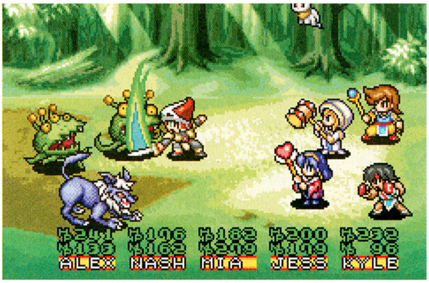
It's not hair spray. It's *magic*!

LUNAR
LEGEND
GAME BOY ADVANCE
EGM SILVER
Ubi Soft

Lunar Legend

This RPG is the stuff that legends are made of. Take heed!

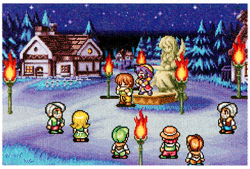
PLATFORM: **GAME BOY ADVANCE**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **MEDIA RINGS/GAME ARTS**
RELEASE DATE: **DECEMBER 2002**
COVERED IN ISSUES: **161, 162, 163, 166**
NUMBER OF SUBSEQUENT LUNAR REMAKES: **1**



Vicious canines and hungry plant monsters are no match for a quintet of feisty, heavily armed, leveled-up youths.

The world of Lunar is a place of fantastic adventures. Sword-wielding heroes travel the land, magic cities float in the sky, and dragons protect the goddess Althena from the machinations of evildoers. Such was the setting for the aptly titled Lunar Legend. Though it may not have the name recognition of its contemporaries such as Golden Sun or the Final Fantasy series, Lunar Legend was one of the best handheld RPGs of its generation.

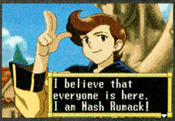
The game told the story of Alex, a teenager from a small village who wanted nothing more than to set out on a grand quest like the ones he'd heard about in tales. This unpretentious setup combined with an engaging cast of diverse characters (including Alex's childhood friend Luna, arrogant magician Nash, and a priestess named Jessica) to create a uniquely vibrant game world. The gameplay was less innovative—Lunar Legend was a traditional turn-based RPG, complete with random battles—but it featured the full complement of weapons, armor, items, and spells that you'd expect from the genre. Furthermore, even though the game was a modified version of Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete for PlayStation (which itself was a remake of Lunar: The Silver Star for Sega CD), this edition featured numerous narrative changes and gameplay alterations to keep it fresh even for those familiar with the series.



Of course, Lunar Legend's innocent, lighthearted atmosphere didn't stay that way for long. The coming-of-age story eventually escalated into an epic of world-changing heroism as Alex and his friends traveled from one end of Lunar to the other so Alex could claim the title of Dragonmaster, save the ones he loves, and prevent the world from falling into chaos. Along the way, gamers were treated to stunning full-screen illustrations, an excellent soundtrack, stellar character development, and one of the best villains ever created for a video game. Despite a lack of attention at the time of its release, Lunar Legend was—and still is—a must-play for RPG fans. **—CHRIS H.**

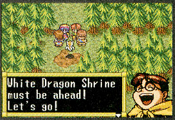
A LEGEND RETOLD

Though Lunar Legend follows the same general plot as its predecessors on Sega CD and PlayStation, the storyline diverges at a few points. Here are some examples.



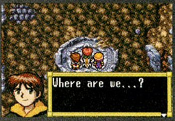
I believe that
everyone is here.
I am Nash Rumack!

SAY HELLO TO NASH
In previous versions of the story, Alex encountered the young magician Nash a few hours into the adventure. In Legend, however, Nash shows up in Alex's hometown at the very beginning of the game. Also, in Legend, Nash has aspirations of being a Dragonmaster.



White Dragon Shrine
must be ahead!
Let's go!

WHERE ART THOU, WHITE DRAGON?
Originally the white dragon lived in a cave of ice, but in Legend his home is deep within a forest.



Where are we...?

CAUGHT IN THE CAVE
Previously Alex had to prove himself in the Cave of Trials before entering the magic city of Vane. In Legend he winds up in a similar cave, but it's due to an accident, not a test.

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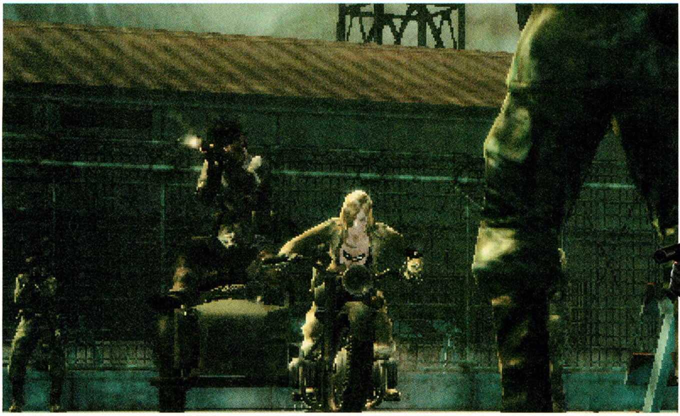
C.C.C.P
DIRECT ACTION SUIT

What a thrill! Go through the rain, feed on a tree frog, and employ close-quarters combat in Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D for N3DS.



Still in a Dream...

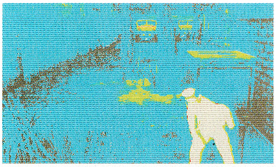
METAL GEAR SOLID: SNAKE EATER 3D

9.0

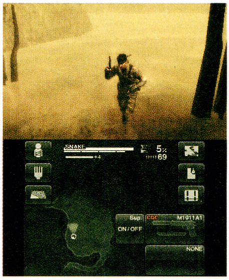
Back in 2004, I had the privilege of reviewing Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater when it originally came out on console. At the time I considered the game a masterpiece, and I rewarded it with a perfect score. Now, more than seven years later, the title is making the leap to the Nintendo 3DS handheld as Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D. So how does it survive the test of time and the jump to a portable system? Extremely well.

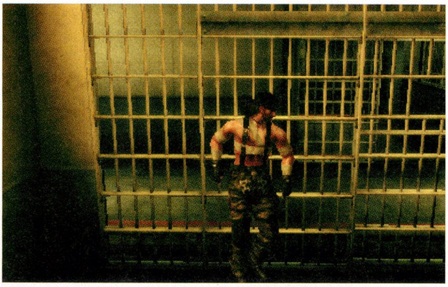
Even with seven-plus years under its belt, Snake Eater looks drop-dead gorgeous. The amount of detail is second to none; outdoor environments feel like living, breathing places, complete with realistically rendered foliage and individual blades of grass. Creatures scurry through the underbrush, birds fly away as you approach, and butterflies flutter in the sunlight. The wind even tugs at protagonist Naked Snake's bandana. Interior scenes are arguably even more impressive, with countless intricate touches such as posters decorating walls, papers covering desks, and books lining shelves. Aside from Capcom's Resident Evil titles, Snake Eater is the best-looking game on N3DS when it comes to a lifelike visual style.

The Metal Gear Solid series has always been masterful at immersing players in its world, and that's taken to new heights in this installment thanks to the inclusion of stereoscopic 3D visuals. You're not just walking through Russian jungles, caves, and



[Left] During the adventure you'll be able to obtain all kinds of useful equipment, including infrared goggles.





swamps; you're now utterly surrounded by them—right in the thick of things. That sensation is further enhanced by some of the best sound design ever implemented in a game. The audio effects aren't merely there for their own sake; sounds warn you of impending danger, tip you off to enemy positions, and provide valuable clues that help you survive. This is one game you'll probably want to play with headphones on.

The final component in the game's immersion factor is a brilliant story that sets the stage for the rest of the Metal Gear saga, yet is grounded in actual history. By linking Snake's mission to real-world people and events, director Hideo Kojima and his team at Kojima Productions manage to weave a dramatic tale that somehow feels fully believable, even when the most outrageous, fantastical elements are introduced. The characterization—particularly with regard to the relationship between Snake and his mentor, The Boss—is equally compelling.

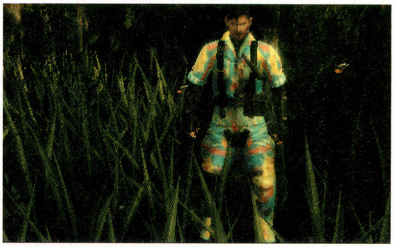
That's all just window dressing, of course, for the excellent gameplay. Few games on any system are so intense and involving. Given that Snake Eater is first and foremost a deliberately paced stealth title, some of the most gripping moments involve doing essentially nothing as you bide your time, conceal yourself in camouflage, monitor enemy movement patterns on your motion detector or sonar, and wait for the opportunity to sneak past foes unseen. (It's worth noting that the camouflage menu is much easier to use than it was in the console version thanks to the inclusion of a touch-screen interface.)

But what makes the game so much fun is that it delivers hard-hitting action equally well. If you get the jump on adversaries, you can take them down with close-quarters combat throws and holds or knock them silly with a flurry of punches. If you'd prefer something more deadly—which you likely will if enemy forces discover you—the game accommodates that expertly, too. You can eliminate foes with a variety of firearms from either a first- or third-person perspective, toss grenades, set mines or TNT to ambush approaching bad guys, or even use the environment to your advantage (such as by dropping a hornet's nest onto an enemy's head or tossing a poisonous spider into his path).

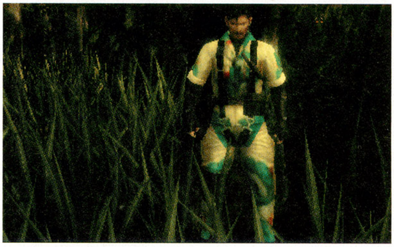
This freedom of choice might be

Clothes Make the Snake

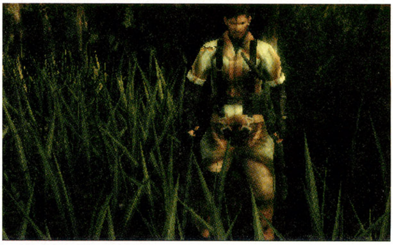
One of the best new features in Snake Eater 3D is the ability to take photos with the Nintendo 3DS system's built-in camera and turn those photos into custom-made camouflage outfits. Here are a few we tried.



NINTENDO POWER VOL. 1 A photo of the cover of Nintendo Power's first issue might not seem like great camo, but according to the game's analysis, it's good for hiding in light-brown areas.



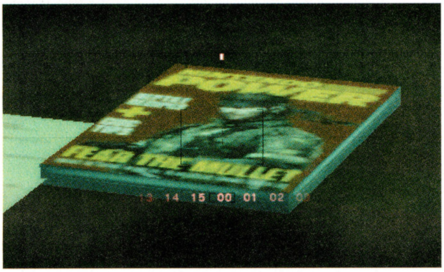
YOSHI Not surprisingly, a photo of a Yoshi toy works great for concealing yourself in tall grass.



PHIL'S HEAD A pattern based on NP writer Phil Theobald's head is supposedly useful underwater, but it's also ideal for mountainous areas. If you lay still, you can raise your camo index to 100 percent! We always knew Phil was good for something!

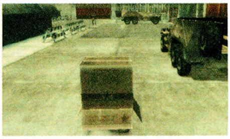
Get the Power

What's that the Russians have on their desks in the Graniny Gorki laboratory? Why, it appears to be an issue of Nintendo Power! Who knew that Soviet scientists in 1964 had such good taste? Though there was never an actual issue of Nintendo Power featuring Snake Eater 3D on the cover, the interior pages (which you can view if you shoot the magazine) contain an actual preview that ran in Vol. 270.



SNAKE
30%
99 99
ALERT
NONE
NONE

[Below] Where Snake goes, his cardboard box follows.



Snake Eater's greatest accomplishment: in almost any situation, you have a variety of viable tactics—both lethal and nonlethal—at your disposal. If you want to slip past unnoticed that option is available, but if you want to go in guns blazing you can do that, too. In one boss fight, for example, you can take out your foe with long-range sniper attacks, try to sneak up on him and defeat him at close range by following his footprints, or use a microphone to discover where he's hiding; you can even assassinate him prior to the battle or let him die of old age. Similarly, when Snake gets captured and thrown in a prison cell, I encountered no fewer than three different ways to escape. And these are just a couple of the countless scenarios you'll come across during the adventure, most of which offer the same level of flexibility.

In addition, Snake Eater succeeds through masterful pacing. Tense enemy encounters are balanced out with conflict-free opportunities for exploration, and just when things seem like they're getting too calm, you find yourself in one of the game's epic boss battles. After a hard-fought victory, you're typically rewarded with a beautifully rendered cinematic sequence before being thrust back into the combat zone. (And if you don't care for cut-scenes, you can skip past them.) The game's climax—in which vehicle chase scenes segue into a stealthy trek through a forest, leading into a boss fight—is especially well done. Snake Eater is the video game equivalent of a rollercoaster; the action peaks and dips while always moving you forward with a rush of adrenaline.

That's all old hat to anyone who's played Snake Eater before, but the N3DS version contains a few new features to spice things up. Photo Camo—the ability to turn any photograph taken with your system's built-in camera into a camouflage pattern for your outfit—is both cool and useful, although the interface is a bit clunky and it has the potential to make some parts of the game too easy. On the other hand, the gyroscopic controls that come into play when Snake needs to maintain his balance are completely unnecessary; they pop up only a few times during the game, and when they do they tend to interfere with traditional character movement. Another new inclusion is the placement of small, hidden Yoshi dolls in nearly every environment—totally throwaway, but a nice bit of fun.

Less fun are a few dark areas that would work fine if displayed on a TV, but are mildly hard to comprehend when viewed on a small screen. Also, some control issues tend to arise when you're navigating cramped environments; it's occasionally hard to move in the direction you intend when you're crawling on your belly, and if you get too close to an object in such situations, you might inadvertently rise to your knees and alert the enemy to your presence. Speaking of the controls, the primary setup—which maps the action button to the Control Pad and relegates camera controls to the face buttons—takes some getting used to. Fortunately, the use of the optional Circle Pad Pro (which puts the camera controls on the right Circle Pad and moves actions to the face buttons) promises to alleviate any problems.

Overall, however, this is a phenomenal game. Almost nothing was sacrificed in bringing the title to the Nintendo 3DS; from the opening scene to the powerful ending, every character model and every bit of excellent voice acting is intact, and the production values are sky-high. If you're of age to play M-rated titles and you haven't witnessed the thrills of Snake Eater before, this is one you won't want to miss—and even if you have embarked on this mission previously, you should consider experiencing it again. Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D is, in a word, awesome. —**CHRIS H.**

N3DS PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS**
ESRB: **MATURE**

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

HELLO
my name is
Chris

This is **Chris**, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB ratings** to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.

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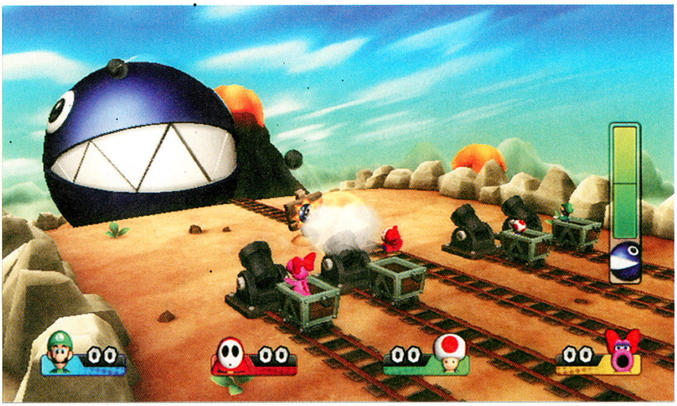


Just Add Chips and Dip

MARIO PARTY 9

8.0

Nearly five years since we last saw a Wii release of the world's longest-running minigame franchise, Nintendo has decided to throw the console one final extravaganza. With the publisher's own Nd Cube replacing Hudson Soft as developer/party planner, the ninth home-console installment introduces a number of interesting modifications that are sure to surprise players as much as they liven up the party.

One of these game-changers is the use of unified transportation (somewhat similar to Mario Party Advance) rather than having players individually travel around a game board. Each competitor takes turns as the driver of the vehicle, and enjoys privileges such as deciding its direction and choosing turn orders for special events, among other fun bonuses. Additionally, coins and stars have been replaced with a single currency, Mini-Stars, which are obtained from minigames, map bonuses, and special events. Since all players share the locational outcome of each dice roll, much of the strategy involved in Mario Party 9's board-play consists of cornering the next player into unfortunate situations, such as an inescapable run-in with the Mini-Star-deducting Mini-Ztars.

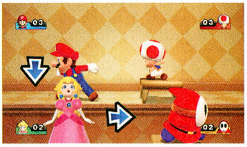
Whether you choose to explore the game's 78 activities solo or with friends, you'll find that the majority of them are fun, including the exciting Boss Battle Mini-Games that mark the midway and end point of each board. During these encounters, the party teams up to "fight" an enemy in the form of a minigame, such as ground-pounding segments of a Wiggler or using the Wii Remote pointer to shoot cannon balls at a giant Blooper. Activities can be enjoyed on a variety of creative stages (such as the Magma Mine board, where players are pressured to think on their feet to avoid the rising lava) and in a multitude of minigame modes, which include four unique competitions and a single-player Time Attack mode.

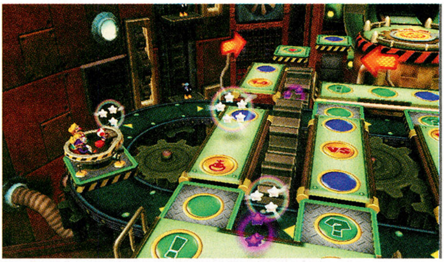
Unfortunately, Mario Party 9's radical changes will be discouraging for some. Having only one currency to fall back on can easily devastate a player's position, as some board elements cause partiers to lose half of their Mini-Stars. Also, group transportation makes it much harder to jeopardize anyone other than the player whose turn comes after yours, which can be frustrating when one player has a significant lead.

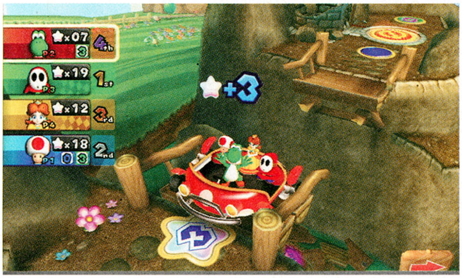
However, Mario Party 9 takes a lot of steps in the right direction. Although it may disappoint avid fans to see the old rules transmogrified, the new style of play offers a level of depth that the series hasn't seen before. Much has been improved since the eighth iteration, and there's a slew of new content to unlock and explore. Even the skeptics should be charmed once they've played a game or two. —**CODY M.**

Wii

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **ND CUBE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**







WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE ABOUT THE RESULTS OF THE 2011 NINTENDO POWER AWARDS?

JUSTIN CHENG

I'm not a sports-game fan, but I really liked FIFA Soccer 12—so much so that I would've given it the award for Best Sports Game.

CHRIS HOFFMAN

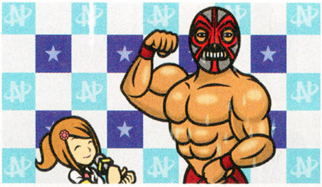
I'm shocked and appalled that The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D didn't win any editors' awards. It's only an enhanced version of one of the best games ever!

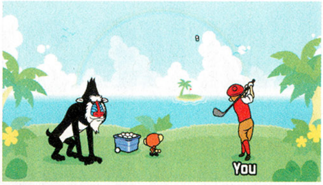
PHIL THEOBALD

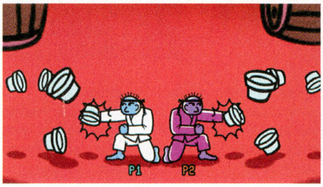
Personally, I would have given the Best Story/Writing award to Back to the Future: The Game. Not only is the story full of shocking cliff-hangers and genuinely funny moments, but it ends up being pretty emotional, too.

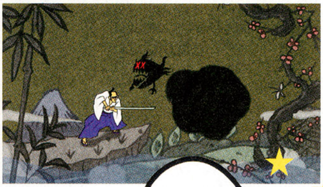
STEVE THOMASON

As much fun as I had with Super Mario 3D Land, I don't think it holds a candle to Rayman Origins. The limbless one's latest definitely should have won the Best Platformer category.









Rhythm Is Gonna Get You

RHYTHM HEAVEN FEVER

8.0

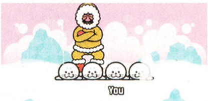
If there is an afterlife, I don't think I'd mind terribly should it turn out to be like Rhythm Heaven. I mean, one minute I'm giving a postmatch interview as a professional wrestler, and the next I'm playing badminton while flying a plane—all to the beat of some pretty infectious music. That doesn't seem like a bad way to spend eternity.

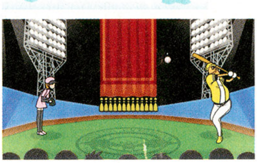
For the time being, I'll make do with Rhythm Heaven Fever. This is the third installment of a critically acclaimed franchise that combines rhythm-based minigames with a delightfully bizarre sense of humor. Not all of Fever's 50 new activities are winners, but only the most jaded player could get through more than a handful without cracking a smile. The game's clean, hand-drawn visual style is charming and surreal, and the soundtrack will stick with you long after you've put down the Wii Remote. Speaking of which, the developers have shown admirable restraint by forgoing motion controls in favor of simple button taps for each minigame. A title like this requires a certain tangible immediacy, and the return to button controls from the stylus-driven gameplay of Rhythm Heaven for DS represents a significant upgrade.

That's not to say Fever isn't challenging. On the contrary, it can be pretty darned frustrating on occasion, and you have to successfully complete each minigame before you can proceed to the next. What's interesting, though, is that my coworkers would breeze through some of the levels with which I struggled, and vice versa. Everyone's sense of rhythm is a bit different, it seems, so if you find yourself getting stuck, it may be worthwhile to ask a friend for help.

Whatever you need to do, Rhythm Heaven's many joys provide more than reason enough to soldier through. At a suggested price of only $30, the game offers a heck of a value to boot. It's packed with all sorts of crazy unlockables and incentives to keep you playing. Now if you'll excuse me, my mandrill friend and I are off to hit the driving range. —**STEVE T.**

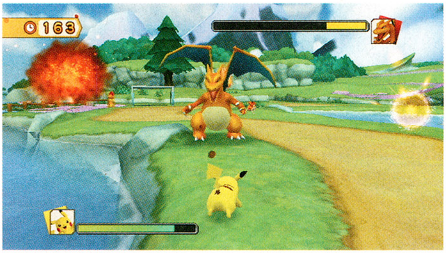
Wii
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO/TNX**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**





Parks and Recreation

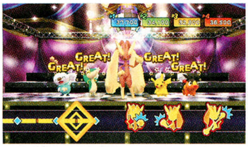
POKÉPARK 2: WONDERS BEYOND

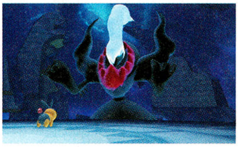


5.5 PokéPark 2 is exceptionally cute; there's no doubt about that. Of course, adorable doesn't necessarily mean exciting. If you're just looking for a quick diversion into the world of Pokémon, you will find that here. The environments aren't graphically impressive, but the Pokémon themselves are well-rendered. The fact that they "speak" in the style of the animated series (by repeating their name) also adds an air of authenticity to the experience. Even the story, which involves a mysterious Wish Park where Pokémon are being hypnotized and held captive, is fairly interesting.

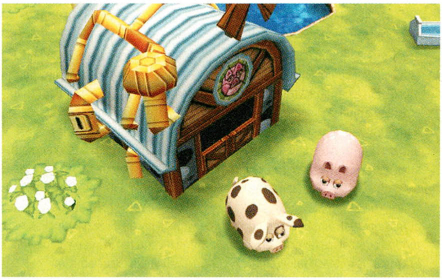
Beyond those surface elements, however, the gameplay is flawed. The most obvious problem is the controls, which suffer due to the required use of the Control Pad to move your Pokémon of choice. Nunchuk support would have been most appreciated. Still, not even fluid controls would remedy the game's sluggish pace, which is worsened by the highly repetitive tasks you're given. Unless you're a younger player, there are only so many times you can chase down a rival Pokémon, play hide-and-seek, or engage in technique-free battles before things get dull. A handful of minigames pop up on occasion, but they're only mildly engaging. Though the ability to replay them with friends adds a little extra enjoyment, it's hardly enough to redeem the single-player mode.

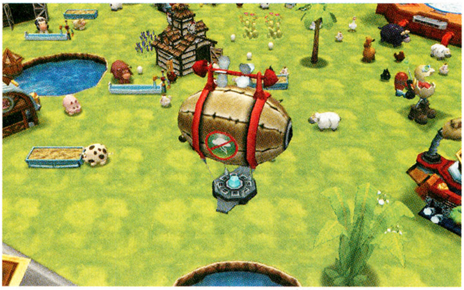
Young fans will likely enjoy tracking down and befriending all of the Pokémon here, but those looking for a deep adventure in line with the traditional Pokémon RPGs should temper expectations. —**PHIL T.**





Wii PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **CREATURES**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**



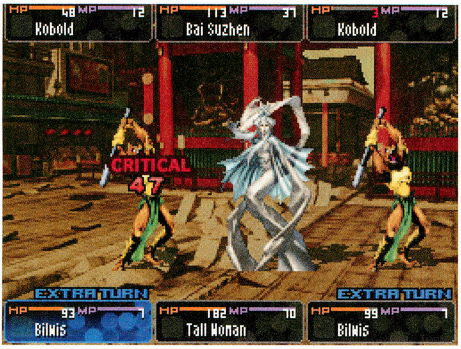


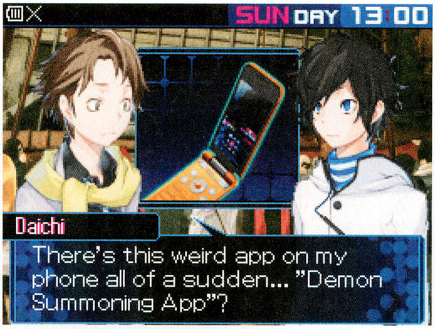
Sorta Funky

FUNKY BARN 3D

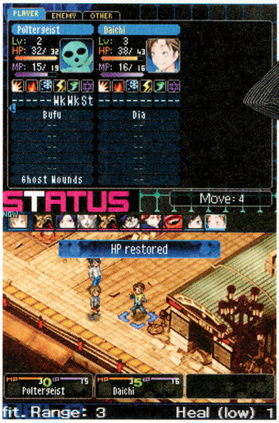
6.0 Farming in Funky Barn 3D has a steep learning curve. My first few hours were spent staring at an empty wallet as my cows whined that they needed better housing, my chickens demanded additional water troughs, and my sheep cried about the lack of foliage in their pasture. Their complaints wouldn't have been so frustrating if my egg collector hadn't needed repairing, too, and if I wasn't already falling behind on a trade deal I'd made with a nearby farmer. I also had problems juggling my responsibilities, what with the water and food needing to be replaced in each pen every few minutes; animals begging for improvements to their quarters; and eggs, wool, milk, and produce piling up to be sold—all of which had to be done by hand (or rather, stylus). But once I started learning which duties to personally take care of and which to pawn off on machines, I began to enjoy my foray into farming. The game's offbeat humor made the tough job more enjoyable, and the ability to unlock multiple scenarios added incentives to come back to the farm. I just wish the developer had lightened up on the number of plates it asked me to spin right away so I could have spent more time enjoying the game and less time worrying about which trough I'd need to fill next. —**HOLLANDER C.**

N3DS PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**


HP 48 MP 12
Kobold
HP 113 MP 37
Bai Suzhen
HP 3 MP 12
Kobold
CRITICAL
47
EXTRA TURN
EXTRA TURN
HP 93 MP 7
Bilwis
HP 182 MP 10
Tall Woman
HP 99 MP 7
Bilwis


SUN DAY 13:00
Daichi

There's this weird app on my phone all of a sudden... "Demon Summoning App"?


PLAYER
ENEMY
OTHER
Poltergeist
Lv: 2
HP: 32/ 32
MP: 15/ 19
Daichi
Lv: 3
HP: 38/ 43
MP: 16/ 16
HkHkSt
Bufu
Dia
Ghost Wounds
STATUS
Move: 4
NOW
HP restored
Poltergeist 30 15
Daichi 35 16
fit. Range: 3
Heal (low) 1

The Lighter Side of Armageddon

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SURVIVOR 2

8.0 Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2 is about the death of untold innocents and the swallowing-up of the Earth by a bottomless abyss. It says something, really, that Atlus's scenario writers could still wedge in some comic relief.

For example, chapter five of the story revolves around a plot to awaken ancient Hindu gods. This is accomplished through a sexy dance number that is meant to inspire the destroyer Shiva to blast an arrow at his rival Kama and in the process knock a giant encroaching demon out of orbit over Tokyo. May Vishnu strike us blind if we made up anything in this paragraph.

The Shin Megami Tensei series has always been flexible that way, though. The basic premise is, frankly, so weird that once you've accepted it, you're open to pretty much anything. In a world where a grinning demon with a pumpkin head can pop out of nowhere to become your best friend, it's not so hard for comedy to follow tragedy.

If that still sounds too goofy, well, trust that most of Devil Survivor 2 is more serious. As a strategy battle game it's as hardcore as they come. Just as in the original Devil Survivor, the Megami Tensei demon fusion system is a perfect fit for the strategy-RPG genre. It allows for an immense amount of customization and gearhead skill-tweaking before every battle, and the demons themselves have way more personality than the little medieval chess pieces that usually inhabit these games.

For the series's second outing, Atlus added a couple of welcome refinements to the combat system, encouraging more teamwork between members of the party and smoothing out points where battles used to slow down. A new take on the Skill Crack feature, for instance, makes it easier to steal spells and skills from the bad guys. Battles are still challenging, make no mistake, but this cuts down on some of the first game's repetitive grind.

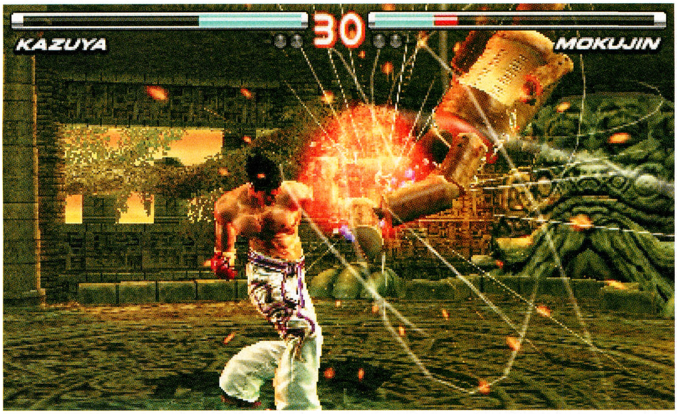
Veteran players will appreciate all that, but they might also feel like the experience in general is a little too familiar. Refined though it is, the combat doesn't have as much of a fresh, unexpected feel, and the story unfolds along some of the same general lines as the last game's—even when it comes time for the plot to branch toward different endings, it happens at about the same point in this story as in the previous one. Likewise, picking an ending involves a similar set of philosophical choices—inevitably, they're not as compelling the second time.

On the other hand, Devil Survivor 2's sense of humor is worth an awful lot. The same goes for replay value, and this game has plenty; even if the experience doesn't feel brand-new, it'll hold an amateur general's attention for a good long while. Mark this down as a solid sequel; with luck we'll see an all-new, all-different end of the world in Devil Survivor 3. —**DAVID S.**

DS PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **ATLUS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

They were all caught in that explosion... No...!

PLAYER
ENEMY
OTHER
Poltergeist
HkHkSt
Bufu
Ghost Wounds
STATUS
Move: 3
Poltergeist
EXTRA TURN
COMMAND
Attack
Guard
HELP
Attack normally
EXTRA TURN



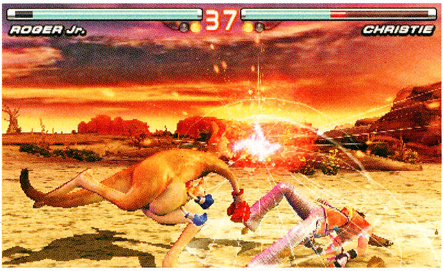
Technically Prime

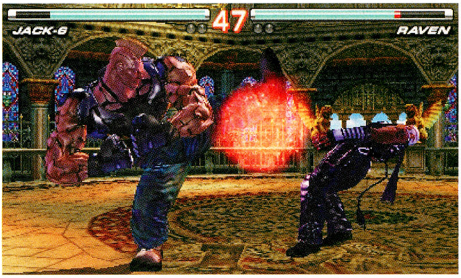
TEKKEN 3D PRIME EDITION

7.5

It's been said numerous times before in this fine publication, and we'll say it again: the N3DS has become *the* Nintendo platform for fighting games. Two of the major franchises—Street Fighter and Dead or Alive—have already graced the handheld, and now the King of Iron Fist Tournament has entered the arena.

I'm happy to say Tekken 3D Prime Edition stacks up pretty well against the competition—in terms of the basics, at least. The developers should be commended for bringing the Tekken experience to a handheld with only a few concessions. The 41-combatant roster pulled from Tekken 6 is diverse. The graphics are stunning, although the battlegrounds can feel disconcertingly lifeless—especially ones in which there are people or animals because, as in Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition, they don't move a muscle. This certainly isn't a major issue, though; the focus is on making the combat as solid as possible. The silky-smooth frame rate—regardless of whether the 3D slider is activated—certainly helps. And the controls work well for the most part. I did have the occasional issue with inputting commands precisely, but that isn't really the game's fault; it was primarily due to the size of my fingers in comparison to the size of the Control Pad and the face buttons on the Nintendo 3DS system. Fortunately, you can assign certain moves to the touch screen, à la SSFIV: 3D Edition.





ARMOR KING
48
FENG

Fighting Flick

The game is just part of the Tekken 3D Prime Edition experience. The other part is the CG-animated *Tekken: Blood Vengeance* movie. Being a 3D flick, *Blood Vengeance* is a perfect fit for the Nintendo 3DS system's autostereoscopic screen—it certainly beats wearing 3D glasses for the duration of the film. As for whether you'd want to sit through a 92-minute-long Xiaoyu-centric movie...well, let's just be grateful for the fact that you can fast-forward to the fight scenes.

My personal control issues aside, Tekken 3D is solid as far as the gameplay is concerned; it feels like Tekken should. However, the overall experience falters when it comes to the single-player modes. The main one is called Special Survival, wherein you try to defeat a series of 5, 10, 20, 40, or 100 opponents. The challenge comes from the fact that you have just one health meter (thankfully, it refills a bit between bouts), and you will encounter foes who have certain advantages, such as always being in Rage mode (granting them enhanced strength). Your rewards for playing Special Survival—other than increasing your characters' ranks—are Tekken Cards. These are 3D pieces of art that you can collect in an album and trade via StreetPass. The cards give completists a goal to work toward, but I never felt the compulsion to collect all 765 of them.

The other single-player mode of note is Quick Battle, which has you fighting across 10 stages. Quick Battle is basically like playing the game in the arcade—so much so, in fact, that there are no ending movies for the characters after you've defeated everyone. This is a shame for this series in particular because the Tekken franchise is famous for impressive cinema scenes in its home-system releases. Perhaps the rationale behind their exclusion is that you get a story from the *Tekken: Blood Vengeance* film (see the sidebar). Or perhaps it was a problem of memory due to both the game and the flick being on a single N3DS card. Whatever the reason, the result is that there's no incentive to play through the Quick Battle mode. And once you've completed everything in Special Survival mode, there's little reason for solo gamers to keep playing at all. Of course, fighting games are best enjoyed with others, and Tekken 3D is no exception. (I cannot comment on the online multiplayer, though, as it wasn't up and running yet at press time.)

From a purely technical standpoint, Tekken 3D Prime Edition is awesome—the graphics and gameplay are top-notch. But the overall lack of a compelling solo experience keeps me from recommending this game more highly. Yes, the multiplayer will help offset the single-player's deficiencies, but fans have come to expect more from the home-system editions of the long-running fighting franchise.

—JUSTIN C.

N3DS PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **TEEN**

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

THE COMPLETE LIST OF NINTENDO POWER REVIEWS FROM THE PAST YEAR

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
The Adventures of Tintin: The Game	5.5	Ubisoft	275	E10+
Back to the Future: The Game	6.5	Telltale	273	T
Bit.Trip Complete	9.0	Aksys	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.5	Sega	270	T
Cars 2: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	269	E10+
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	6.0	Crave	274	E10+
Centipede: Infestation	6.5	Atari	273	E10+
Conduit 2	7.5	Sega	266	T
de Blob 2	8.0	THQ	265	E
Disney Universe	4.5	Disney	273	E10+
Driver San Francisco	4.5	Ubisoft	271	T
Epic Mickey	8.5	Disney	263	E
FIFA Soccer 12	8.0	EA Sports	272	E
Fishing Resort	7.5	XSEED	273	E
Fortune Street	7.5	Nintendo	274	E
Go Vacation	7.0	Namco Bandai	273	E10+
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Kung Fu Panda 2	2.5	THQ	268	E10+
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	7.0	Warner Bros.	274	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	9.5	Nintendo	274	E10+
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	268	E10+
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.0	LucasArts	266	E10+
Lost In Shadow	8.0	Hudson	263	E10+
Madden NFL 12	7.0	Electronic Arts	271	E
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	7.0	Sega	273	E
Mario Sports Mix	8.0	Nintendo	264	E
Mystery Case Files: The Malgrave Incident	6.0	Nintendo	269	E
NASCAR 2011: The Game	3.0	Activision	269	E
Rango	5.0	Paramount	266	E10+
Rayman Origins	9.5	Ubisoft	273	E10+
Rio	4.0	THQ	267	E
Rune Factory: Tides of Destiny	8.0	Natsume	272	E10+
Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	7.0	Activision	273	E10+
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	7.0	Activision	273	T
SpongeBob SquigglePants	7.0	THQ	266	E
Super Mario All-Stars	9.0	Nintendo	263	E
Thor: God of Thunder	5.5	Sega	267	T
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	8.5	Electronic Arts	266	E
Top Spin 4	7.0	2K Sports	266	E
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Stealth Force Edition	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution—Battle Grids	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
Virtua Tennis 4	8.0	Sega	267	E
Wii Play: Motion	7.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
Worms: Battle Islands	7.0	THQ	264	E10+
WWE '12	6.5	THQ	274	T
WWE All Stars	6.5	THQ	266	T
X-Men Destiny	2.5	Activision	273	T

MORE ON:

THE KORE GANG: OUTVASION FROM INNER EARTH

I believe The Kore Gang is the only platformer I've played in which enemies and NPCs burst into song on a routine basis. That alone makes this game worth a look. Sadly, it's not worth much more than that. Despite its bizarre sense of humor and the evident effort that went into aspects such as CG cut-scenes and the aforementioned musical numbers, this title is incredibly sloppy. It's full of collision issues, camera problems, and other bugs, and it just feels unfinished. —CHRIS H.

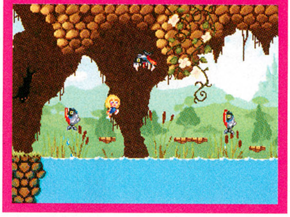
Nintendo DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Aliens: Infestation	8.0	Sega	272	T
ATV Wild Ride	7.0	Destineer	264	E
Bejeweled 3	8.5	PopCap	274	E
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	5.0	Majesco	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	3.5	Sega	270	E10+
de Blob 2	8.0	THQ	265	E
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation	7.5	Nintendo	265	T
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2	7.5	Nintendo	271	E
Fossil Fighters: Champions	8.0	Nintendo	273	E
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective	9.0	Capcom	263	T
Giana Sisters DS	9.0	Destineer	265	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	3.5	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns DS	8.0	Natsume	272	E
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded	8.0	Square Enix	263	E10+
Kirby Mass Attack	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Kung Fu Panda 2	4.5	THQ	268	E10+
LEGO Battles: Ninjago	7.5	Warner Bros.	267	E
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.0	LucasArts	266	E
Monster Tale	8.0	Majesco	265	E
Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble	6.0	Tomy	264	T
Okamiden	8.0	Capcom	265	E10+
Plants vs. Zombies	9.0	PopCap	264	E10+
Pokémon Black and Pokémon White Versions	9.0	Nintendo	265	E
Professor Layton and the Last Specter	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Radiant Historia	8.5	Atlus	265	E10+
Rango	7.0	Paramount	266	E

MORE ON:

GIANA SISTERS DS

Clearly drawing inspiration from the original Super Mario Bros., Giana Sisters DS is a medley of clever level design, precise control, and catchy tunes. The game is simplistic, but it's still a fantastic platformer. About nine months after we reviewed this title, it was quietly released in North America to a few online retailers. Don't miss this hidden gem! —CODY M.



Rio	5.5	THQ	267	E
Solatorobo: Red the Hunter	9.0	Xseed	271	E10+
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	5.0	Activision	273	E10+
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	267	E10+
Transformers: Dark of the Moon–Autobots/ Decepticons	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
X-Men Destiny	2.0	Activision	273	E10+

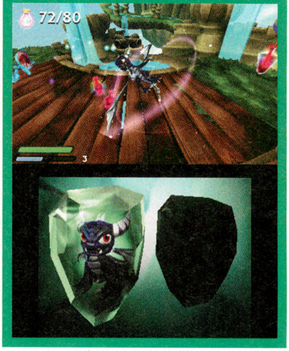
Nintendo 3DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy	7.5	Namco Bandai	273	T
Asphalt 3D	6.0	Ubisoft	266	E10+
Bit.Trip Saga	8.0	Aksys	271	E
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift II	8.5	Aksys	268	T
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.0	Sega	273	T
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion	7.0	Crave	267	E10+
Cave Story 3D	8.0	NIS America	273	E10+
Centipede: Infestation	6.5	Atari	273	E10+
Cooking Mama 4: Kitchen Magic	5.0	Majesco	273	E
Crush 3D	7.0	Sega	275	E10+
Cubic Ninja	4.0	Ubisoft	268	E
Dead or Alive Dimensions	9.0	Tecmo Koei	267	T
Deca Sports Extreme	5.0	Konami	271	E
Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights	6.5	Konami	272	E10+
Driver Renegade	3.0	Ubisoft	271	M
Dual Pen Sports	7.0	Namco Bandai	270	E10+
Face Racers: Photo Finish	4.0	Majesco	271	E
FIFA Soccer 12	7.0	EA Sports	272	E
Frogger 3D	6.5	Konami	271	E
Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D	5.5	Natsume	271	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns 3D	7.5	Natsume	272	E
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	5.0	Ubisoft	273	T
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	9.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	7.0	Warner Bros.	274	E10+
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.5	LucasArts	266	E10+
Madden NFL Football	6.0	Electronic Arts	266	E
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	7.0	Sega	275	E
Mario Kart 7	9.0	Nintendo	274	E
Michael Jackson: The Experience	5.0	Ubisoft	273	E10+
Nano Assault	7.0	Majesco	273	E10+
Nikoli's Pencil Puzzle	6.0	Konami	272	E
nintendogs + cats	7.5	Nintendo	266	E
Order Up!!	6.5	UTV Ignition	275	E
Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions	7.0	Namco Bandai	269	E10+
Pac-Man Party 3D	4.5	Namco Bandai	273	E
Pet Zombies	5.5	Majesco	272	T
Pilotwings Resort	8.0	Nintendo	266	E
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection 3D	7.0	Crave	268	E10+
Pokémon Rumble Blast	7.5	Nintendo	273	E
Rabbids Travel in Time 3D	6.5	Ubisoft	267	E
Rayman 3D	8.0	Ubisoft	266	E
Reel Fishing Paradise 3D	6.0	Natsume	269	E
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	7.5	Capcom	269	M
Resident Evil: Revelations	9.0	Capcom	275	M
Ridge Racer 3D	8.0	Namco Bandai	266	E
Samurai Warriors: Chronicles	7.0	Tecmo Koei	266	T
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	9.0	Atlus	271	T
Shinobi	7.5	Sega	273	T
The Sims 3	7.0	Electronic Arts	266	T
The Sims 3 Pets	7.5	Electronic Arts	273	T
Sonic Generations	8.0	Sega	274	E
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.0	Activision	273	T
SpongeBob SquigglePants	7.5	THQ	267	E
Star Fox 64 3D	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Steel Diver	8.0	Nintendo	266	E10+
Super Mario 3D Land	9.0	Nintendo	273	E
Super Monkey Ball 3D	7.5	Sega	266	E
Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition	9.0	Capcom	266	T
Tales of the Abyss	7.0	Namco Bandai	275	T
Tetris Axis	7.5	Nintendo	272	E
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	272	T
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars	8.0	Ubisoft	266	T
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D	5.5	Ubisoft	267	T
Transformers: Dark of the Moon–Stealth Force Edition	4.0	Activision	270	E10+
WWE All Stars	7.5	THQ	274	T

MORE ON:

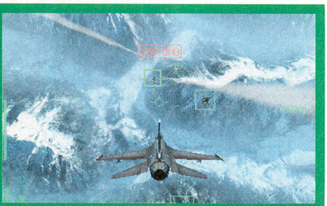
SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE

I'm a fan of both video games and toys, so Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure is right up my alley. Being able to play with your figurines in a game is a great idea (although I can see why some critics call it exploitative), and I was pleasantly surprised by how much fun I had with this handheld action-platformer. —JUSTIN C.



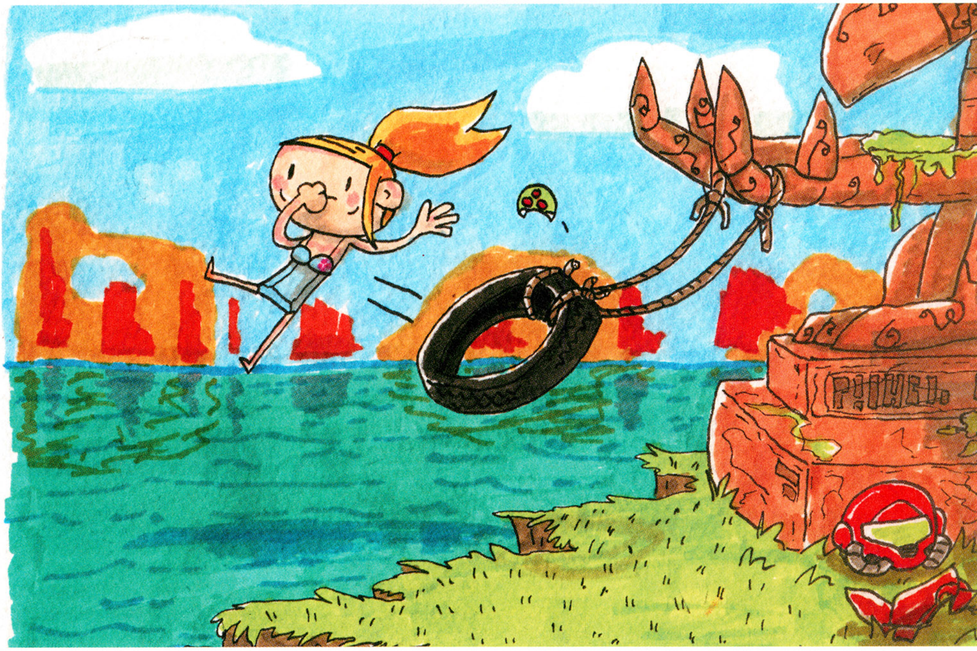
MORE ON:

ACE COMBAT: ASSAULT HORIZON LEGACY



Even if you're not into flight simulators, the arcade-style action of Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy is plenty enjoyable. The cinematic way in which you get the drop on the enemy before nailing them with missiles adds to the excitement, and the relatively short missions make the game perfect for a handheld system. —PHIL T.

COMMUNITY



FANDOM

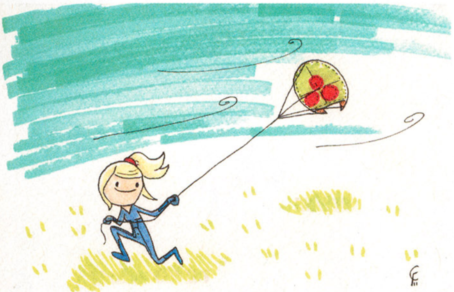
31 Days Later

For every day last July, this artist's muse was Metroid's Samus Aran.

SAMUS ARAN has always been something of an outlier in the Nintendo-verse: Not only is she a strong and silent (well, up until Other M, anyway) female protagonist, but she isn't one to sit around and wait for some pudgy plumber or sword-wielding Hylian to save her—she's the one doing the saving. So, it's fitting that Metroid's famous intergalactic bounty hunter gets a fan tribute that's just as out-of-the-ordinary. Every single day in July of last year, Chris Furniss would conceive, ink, and marker a single-panel or full-blown comic based on a suggestion tweeted by his friend Ross Rosenberg earlier that same day. The pair are cohosts on The Weekly Geek podcast, and Rosenberg challenged Furniss on air after Furniss was lamenting how little he had been drawing lately. The results, unsurprisingly, are as varied as they are impressive—and the timing was perfect, since it serendipitously coincided with Metroid's 25th anniversary in early August.

"It was equal parts social pressure and a love of the franchise," explains Furniss. "As it went along it became more apparent that what we were doing was actually kind of interesting. Samus, especially in her Zero Suit incarnation, is frequently oversexualized when she's depicted by artists on the Internet. We wanted to present a more fun, mature representation of Samus."

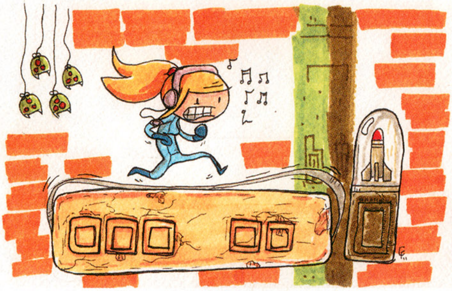
He certainly succeeded on that front, whether it's showing Ms. Aran flying a Metroid kite in a pleasantly blustery afternoon sky (our personal favorite) or depicting her in more humdrum tasks, like shopping for helmets. Furniss also stumbled onto an amusing uniting

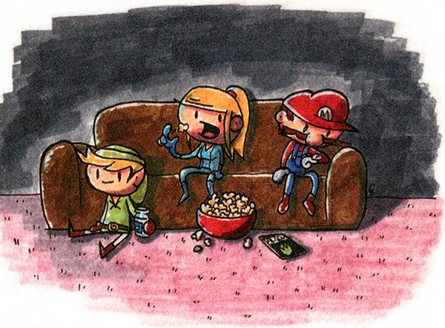


concept that was present in many of the panels: "The inspiration for each individual day started to grow organically. I started drawing on an imagined multiverse populated by Smash Bros. characters—I imagined they all lived in the same house, Real World-style."

This led to some of the most humorous strips and concepts, like Mario and Samus's on-again, off-again romance, during which Mario's growing indifference to her manifests in his constantly glancing at his wrist watch; and Sonic and Bowser bonding over their mutual love of gold rings at a party thrown by Samus. The 31-day project yielded a lot of bizarre moments like these, but what shines through above all else is a legitimate and deep love for the source material.

It doesn't hurt that Furniss got a lot out of it. "I learned to trust my own personal style," he recalls. "I started the series with an interpretation of Samus in my own style.... I'd been frustrated with developing my own personal style for my whole career as an artist, and I've learned that repetition is the key. You just have to keep drawing and drawing and drawing until something clicks." —**DAVID W.**





TAKE *your best* SHOT

PHOTO CHALLENGE

SEND YOUR PICS TO photos@nintendopower.com.

Use your Nintendo DSi or Nintendo 3DS system to snap a fun, gaming-related photo that matches this month's theme, then transfer the image to a computer using an SD card reader and e-mail it to the above address. We'll print the best ones.

THIS MONTH'S THEME: VALENTINE'S DAY

VOLUME 274'S THEME: HAPPY HOLIDAYS

PHOTOGRAPH FROM [NO NAME GIVEN]

PHOTOGRAPH FROM ZACK T.

READERS UNDER THE AGE OF 18 MUST GET A PARENT'S PERMISSION TO SUBMIT A PHOTO.

ABOVE *and* BEYOND

Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Court, STE 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. We'll print the best stuff!

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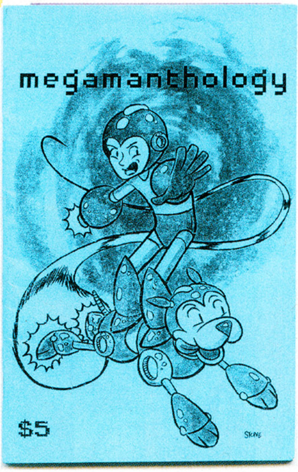
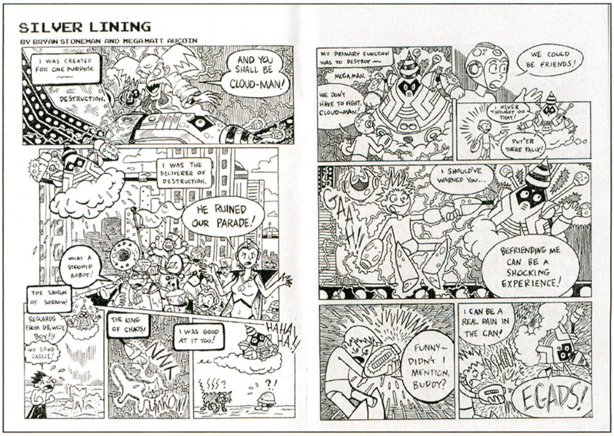

megamanthology
$5
STONE


SILVER LINING
BY BRYAN STONEMAN AND MEGA MATT AUCOIN
I WAS CREATED FOR ONE PURPOSE ~~
DESTRUCTION.
AND YOU SHALL BE CLOUD-MAN!
I WAS THE DELIVERER OF DESTRUCTION.
HE RUINED OUR PARADE!
WHAT A STOOPID ROBOT!
THE SHOGUN OF SORROW!
REGUARDS FROM DR. WILY BOY!!!
MY SAND CASTLE!
THE KING OF CHAOS!
NYT
MROW!
I WAS GOOD AT IT TOO!
HAHA HA!!
?!
MY PRIMARY FUNCTION WAS TO DESTROY ~~
MEGA MAN.
WE DON'T HAVE TO FIGHT, CLOUD-MAN!
WE COULD BE FRIENDS!
I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT!
PUT'ER THERE PALLY!
I SHOULD'VE WARNED YOU...
GAAH!!
BEFRIENDING ME CAN BE A SHOCKING EXPERIENCE!
FUNNY~ DIDN'T I MENTION, BUDDY?
I CAN BE A REAL PAIN IN THE CAN!
EGADS!

This anthology features Mega Mantastic comics from a variety of artists, including Randall Drew, Andrew Decrescenzo, Bill Volk, and Casey Bohn.

FANDOM

Make Mine Mega Man

Get equipped with indie comics.

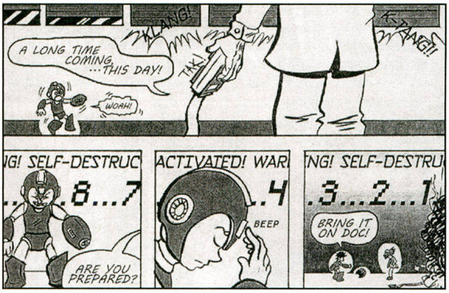
CONSIDERING HOW EASY IT IS for anyone to set up a blog or a web comic these days, it's always refreshing to see fans dedicated enough to produce a physical, photocopied paper-and-stapler fanzine. Southern Vermont-based cartoonist Matt Aucoin, 29, proved his indie cred by creating the Mega Manthology, a 48-page collection of original comics and pin-up illustrations based on Capcom's beloved Blue Bomber.

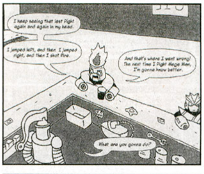
The stories contained within the Manthology are the creations of 10 writers and artists, each of whom provides a unique take on Mega Man and the characters that inhabit his universe. The collection includes a haunting comic in which Mega Man reflects on the devastation that he causes in the name of peace, a tale that recounts Mega Man's final moments as a functioning robot, and a realistically styled prequel to filmmaker Eddie Lebron's live-action Mega Man fan film (which we covered in Vol. 261).

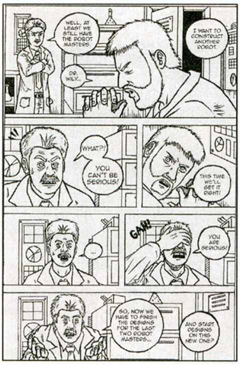
The comics aren't all downers, however. There are also humorous pieces that explore what goes on in the mind of a reformed Robot Master, the hazards of Dr. Wily's engineering design choices, and what happens when a Met (Mega Man's hard-hat-wearing foe) falls in love. We even get to check out the action at Pump Man's Oil Bar, where Robot Masters go to unwind after a hard day of losing to Mega Man.

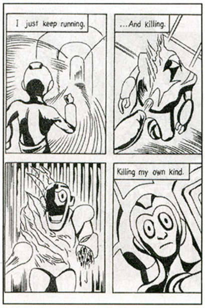
Given the "small press" status of Aucoin's 'zine, getting ahold of this collection isn't as easy as walking to your local comic shop. Those on the east coast of the United States might be able to find it at some of the region's comic conventions, and the rest of us can follow Aucoin's work at www.mischiefcomics.com.

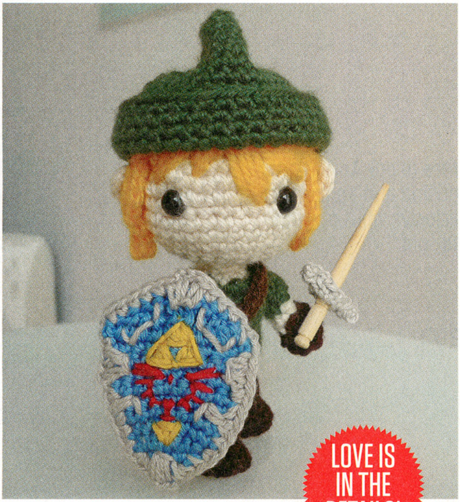
—PHIL T.


KLANG!
K-RANG!!
A LONG TIME COMING... THIS DAY!
TAK!
WOAH!
NG! SELF-DESTRUC
...8...7
ACTIVATED! WAR
.4
BEEP
ARE YOU PREPARED?
NG! SELF-DESTRU
.3...2...1
BRING IT ON DOC!


I keep seeing that last fight again and again in my head.
I jumped left, and then I jumped right, and then I shot fire.
And that's where I went wrong! The next time I fight Mega Man, I'm gonna know better.
What are you gonna do?


WELL, AT LEAST WE STILL HAVE THE ROBOT MASTERS.
DR. WILY...
I WANT TO CONSTRUCT ANOTHER ROBOT.
WHAT?!
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!
THIS TIME WE'LL GET IT RIGHT!
...
GAH!
YOU ARE SERIOUS!
SO, NOW WE HAVE TO FINISH THE DESIGNS FOR THE LAST TWO ROBOT MASTERS...
AND START DESIGNS ON THIS NEW ONE?


I just keep running.
...And Killing.
Killing my own Kind.



LOVE IS IN THE DETAILS!

FANDOM

Lover's Link

This Zelda-inspired *amigurumi* makes for matrimonial harmony.

FORGET SWORDS, arrows, and slingshots—this delightful *amigurumi* (knitted or crocheted stuffed toy) rendition of Hyrule's iconic hero made by a husband-and-wife duo has the power to stop foes dead in their tracks with its sheer charm. Hobbyist Stephanie Jessica Lau, 26, from Alberta, Canada, got into crocheting *amigurumi* after marrying her husband, Ryan, who often pitches in to help with her yarn-crafting projects. Together the pair made a marvelous pint-sized Link from Ocarina of Time to pay homage to their favorite game in the Legend of Zelda series.

Following a pattern by Japanese artist Becchin, Lau created Link's body with a unique feature: a head that can pivot to give him more personality and a range of poses. A ball joint crocheted inside the little fellow's noggin makes this possible, and it's a cool addition. But what's a hero without all his sweet gear? Knowing her little Link wouldn't be complete without his accessories, Lau came up with her own design for his sword, a sheath, and his Hylian shield, which add a nice touch of authenticity.

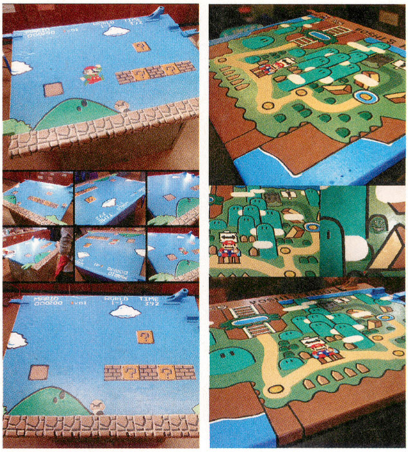
Creating *amigurumi* is rewarding on its own, but Lau says working with her husband is a lot of fun too. "I think we're a great team, and we love doing this together," she explains. "Ryan helps me a lot with my hobby, as he has a keen sense of style and a great eye for detail. [He] was the one who actually embroidered the designs onto the Hylian shield for me, and I was blown away by how accurate and intricate it turned out."

Extra touches like the tiny accessories and the detailed shield embroidery make the already impressive Link doll 400 percent more awesome. We can't wait to see what the crafty couple comes up with next! **—NATHAN M.**

FANDOM

Tabletop Mario

Students give art class a fun spin with these Mario-themed tables.



TAKING A SHORT BREAK from his Nintendo-themed papercrafting projects, art student Khris Ramirez, 18, decided to spice up his workspace at school by transforming this table into a full-blown Super Mario Bros. mural—with teacher permission, of course. We can't imagine a more fun way to get through the school day.

"Since I started taking art classes in high school, every year we were able to paint whatever we wanted on the tables in one of my classes," Ramirez explains. "My friends and I thought it was a perfect way to give tribute to Mario games, so we painted a screen capture of one of the most iconic stages in Mario history: World 1-1."

Completed in about four hours, the first table scene was painted on the last day of school. Ramirez and his pals continued the tradition the following year, upping the challenge by painting the tables with a more ambitious scene: the overworld map from Super Mario World. It took 10 students working together for upward of 10 hours to complete the second table painting, and the effort really shows. Maybe next year Ramirez will assemble a small student army and shoot for Super Mario 64! **—NATHAN M.**

NEXT MONTH

There will be no fooling around when it comes to our April issue. We'll have the final word on Kid Icarus: Uprising and Xenoblade Chronicles in our full reviews, and get an exclusive whiff of a top-secret title that promises to make your head spin.

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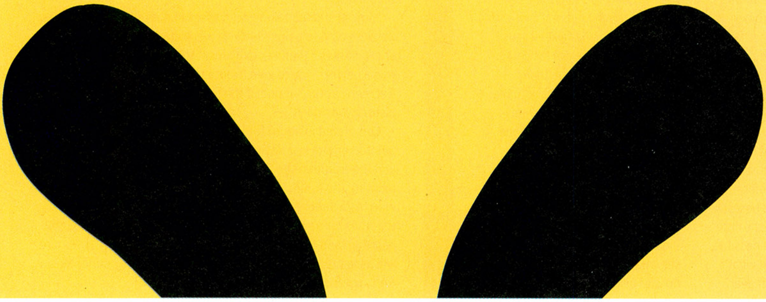

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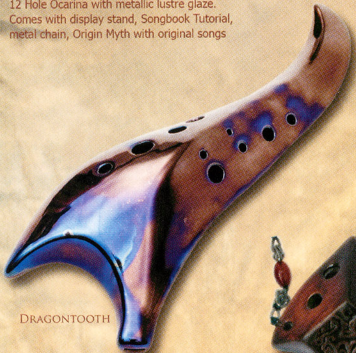

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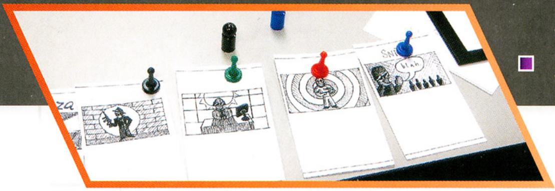

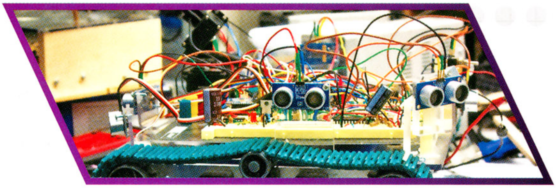

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